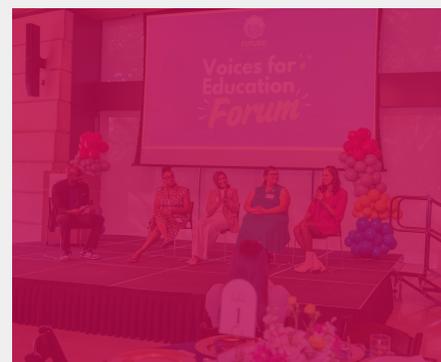
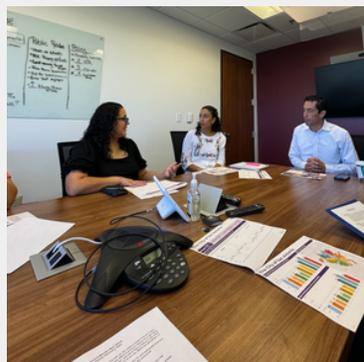
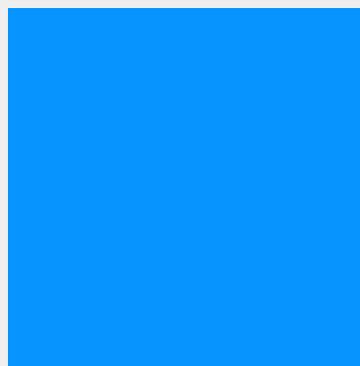
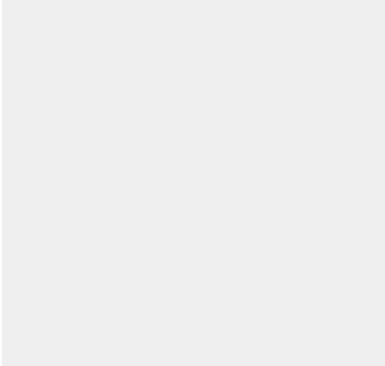


Community Listening Sessions on Chronic Absenteeism and Literacy

2026



FUTURO
SAN ANTONIO





Executive Summary

Between November 3 and November 15, 2025, four parent- and youth-led Community Listening Sessions were held across the Westside, Southside, Eastside, and Downtown San Antonio. More than 80 families, caregivers, and young people participated, sharing lived experiences related to chronic absenteeism and literacy. These sessions surfaced deeply consistent concerns across geography, age, and school context, alongside place-specific realities that shape how families experience schools and public systems. The priorities elevated in this report are intended to inform Futuro parent leaders and partners as they select and advance policy priorities moving forward.

Overall, participants expressed strong commitment to their children's education and a desire to be effective partners in learning. These conversations were led by Futuro-trained parent leaders, who facilitated dialogue with community members and centered lived experience throughout each session. However, they described a system that often feels difficult to navigate, fragmented, and misaligned with the realities of working families and youth today. Literacy challenges and absenteeism were not viewed as isolated problems, but as symptoms of broader structural barriers including transportation, time scarcity, language access, safety, housing instability, and trust in institutions.





Conversation Themes

1

Attendance barriers are rooted in safety and basic needs

Transportation challenges, unsafe routes or stops, bullying, mental health stress, immigration enforcement fears, housing instability, and unmet basic needs were consistently named as drivers of absenteeism rather than lack of parental concern.

2

Families want to help, but lack clarity and tools

Across all sessions, caregivers expressed confusion about grade-level expectations, reading levels, and what questions to ask schools. Grades alone were seen as insufficient indicators of learning, and families often did not know how to support reading and writing at home or when to push for intervention.

3

Time scarcity and exhaustion shape daily decisions

Parents described long work hours, multiple jobs, caregiving responsibilities, and survival-mode decision making. These realities limit time for reading routines, homework support, school engagement, and consistent attendance, even when families highly value education.

4

Unequal access to literacy resources and spaces

Many participants cited a lack of books at home, limited or inconvenient library hours, transportation barriers to libraries, and reduced access to libraries during the school day. These gaps disproportionately affect families already facing economic constraints.



5 Language access remains a persistent barrier

Language barriers were named explicitly, particularly the need for more Spanish-speaking teachers, bilingual communication, and expanded ESL supports. Families reported missing information or feeling disconnected due to language gaps.

6 Learning differences are identified and supported too slowly

Concerns about dyslexia and other learning differences surfaced repeatedly. Participants described limited awareness of testing, delays in follow-through, inconsistent accommodations, and frustration with how long it takes for children to receive meaningful support.

7 Motivation, engagement, and shame affect both literacy and attendance

Youth and caregivers alike spoke about embarrassment around reading, low confidence, boredom, and disengagement. School was often described as not feeling relevant or enjoyable, which in turn affects attendance and willingness to seek help.

8 System-level classroom pressures impact learning

Families raised concerns about large class sizes, teacher turnover, inconsistent curriculum shifts, and pressure to teach to standardized tests. These factors were seen as limiting individualized attention and foundational literacy instruction.



Frequently Recurring Issues

Top Themes

- Confusion about literacy benchmarks and intervention pathways
- Chronic time and energy constraints for families
- Transportation as a dominant barrier to attendance
- Safety concerns (bullying, transit safety, neighborhood conditions)
- Low trust and limited communication between families and systems

Policy Implications

- Simplify and standardize family-facing information on literacy and attendance
- Align school and city supports with working family schedules
- Treat absenteeism as a cross-sector issue involving transportation, housing, and safety
- Invest in trust-building, non-punitive family engagement models

Closing: From Community Voice to Policy Action

Futuro parent leaders intend to use what they heard in these sessions to define the policy issues they will advance in the months ahead. Community members named not only challenges, but clear priorities and solutions to guide future advocacy and policy efforts rooted in lived experience.





Westside Session

November 3, 2025

Community Voice Summary

Participants emphasized the need for clearer visibility into reading levels, higher quality teaching, and faster intervention. Feelings of embarrassment and disconnection between home and school were prominent.

Distinctive Mentions

Concerns about bus stop conditions and immigration enforcement fears were raised, alongside questions about funding priorities.

Southside Session

November 6, 2025

Community Voice Summary

Families highlighted affordability barriers including books, uniforms, program eligibility thresholds, and transit costs. There was strong emphasis on phonics and follow-through after testing.

Distinctive Mentions

Detailed frustration with VIA processes and safety concerns for students using public transit.

Eastside Session

November 12, 2025

Community Voice Summary

Participants emphasized the need for clearer visibility into reading levels, higher quality teaching, and faster intervention. Feelings of embarrassment and disconnection between home and school were prominent.

Distinctive Mentions

Concerns about bus stop conditions and immigration enforcement fears were raised, alongside questions about funding priorities.

Downtown Session (Youth)

November 15, 2025

Community Voice Summary

Youth emphasized engagement, relevance, and inspiration. They expressed desire for programs that connect learning to real opportunities and future pathways.

Distinctive Mentions

Book bans, nuanced views on public transit safety, and the value of exposure experiences such as college visits.