



Meet Señora Joaquín

Señora Joaquín grew up in Mexico with dreams of becoming a teacher. There she raised her 3 children while her husband worked in the United States. Three years ago she and her children moved to Chicago to be a united family. Her children are enrolled in a Neighborhood high school on the west side of Chicago: her oldest son is a senior, her daughter is a sophomore, and her youngest daughter is a 9th grader. *“La alegría y el gusto de estar aquí en Estados Unidos, pues desde que estamos ya juntos como familia.”* (The happiness and joy of being here in the United States, now we are united like a family.)

Navigating the Postsecondary Journey: As a Parent

Señora Joaquín learned about **Parent University** through both her son and the English Learner program teacher. Parent University is a CPS program that offers classes and workshops for CPS parents and guardians. *“La maestra es una maestra que les enseña inglés y ella me invitó a que fuera con ella a visitarla. Entonces ahí conocí a las personas de la Universidad de Padres. Me platicaron que ya había clases de inglés, que había clases de computación, y me invitaron y por eso fue que me di cuenta que quisiera acercarme a la escuela.”* (The teacher teaches English and she invited me to visit her. During my meeting, I met the other people in Parents University. They talked about having an English class, a computer class and they invited me. And that's why I realized I wanted to get more involved with the school)

Now, Señora Joaquín is a Parent University student at her children 's high school. She's been taking classes for over a year. *“Yo voy a la high school de mis niños y allí yo*

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también estudio el inglés. Tengo clases hoy. Y también computación.” (I attend my children’s high school where I also study English. I have class today. Also my computer class.) She considers the classes essential in equipping her with the tools to help navigate life here in Chicago.

Learning English has been the biggest and most challenging priority for her and her family. *“El inglés es difícil porque ya no crea que ya uno de grande ya no se le pega tan fácilmente. Pero tenemos una maestra muy buena. Te comprende. Te ayuda. Y te enseña muy bien.”* (English is difficult because, well for someone who’s older, things don’t stick as easily. But we have a great teacher. She understands you. She helps you. And she teaches you really well.)

She also appreciates how her computing class is helping her keep up with the technological times. *“Está uno avanzando con tanta tecnología que pues tiene uno que aprender. Tiene uno que abrirse caminos porque hay veces que pedimos ayuda a los niños, hay veces que los niños tienen tareas o simplemente porque a veces no quieren o no pueden ayudarlo.”* (We are advancing with so much technology that we have to learn. We have to open our paths because there are times that we ask the kids for help, but sometimes the kids have homework or sometimes they just don’t want to help.)

Señora Joaquín’s favorite program is Parent Mentors. There she assists teachers in the classroom. During her time in the classroom, she regularly worked with newly arrived students. *“De pequeña yo decía que quería ser maestra. Por obstáculos de la vida, nunca pude seguir estudiando. Entonces este [programa] me encantó. Yo me sentía realizada como si fuera una maestra. Yo me sentía realizada porque yo ayudaba a los niños y luego ahora con las personas que [recién] llegaron aquí al país. Entonces muchos niños llegaron muy atrasados... Sí, hay veces que estaban en segundo grado y los niños a veces no sabían escribir ni leer. Entonces este fue una satisfacción muy bonita enseñarles a los niños a leer y escribir los números. Quedé encantada con ese programa.”* (Since I was little I would say I wanted to be a teacher. Because of life challenges I couldn’t continue my education. So I loved this program. I felt fulfilled, like I was a teacher. I felt fulfilled because I helped the students, and now with people who recently arrived in the country. Some of the children who arrived were very behind. There were some students who were in second grade and sometimes couldn’t write or read. So

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this was a nice and satisfying role to teach the children how to read and write numbers. I was overjoyed with the program.)

Parent Mentors was a volunteer opportunity that helped her fulfill her teaching dreams. The experience also helped boost her confidence. The teacher she worked with encouraged Señora Joaquín to consider continuing to pursue becoming a teacher. “Dice ‘Miss Joaquín, usted tiene vocación. Échele muchas ganas. Nunca es tarde para eso’...Me dio gusto que una maestra con experiencia me dijera que sí, puedo con echándole ganas.” (She said, ‘Ms. Joaquin, you have a vocation. Continue putting in a lot of effort. It’s never too late for it.’ It brought me a lot of joy that an experienced teacher said that yes, I could do it if I put in the effort).

First child

Señora Joaquín’s eldest child is currently in 12th grade. He is academically driven and is planning to pursue a career in medicine. One of the biggest challenges he and her other daughters face is learning English. “*Fue un cambio muy difícil porque él no sabe inglés. El idioma es muy importante. Entonces, este también fue un reto para mis hijos porque pues no sabían inglés. Entonces el adaptarse a una escuela fue difícil.*” (It was a difficult change because of not knowing English. Language is really important. Not knowing English was a challenge for my children. So acclimating to schools was really difficult.)

Still in just 3 years, her children have made tremendous progress and currently her son is planning to enroll in college.

Señora Joaquín has had brief conversations with the school counselor, mainly through seeing each other in passing. “*Como voy a veces a estudiar a la high school de mis niños. Entonces ahí a veces tengo conversación con ella.*” (Because I go to learn at my children’s high school, sometimes I have conversations with her).

They’ve mainly talked about her son’s college plans. She finds it easy to talk to her, especially because she also speaks Spanish. “*Ella habla español, entonces, por eso tenemos más cercanía.*” (She speaks Spanish, that’s why we have a closer [connection])

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Her son worked directly with the counselor to apply to 5 schools. Being new to the educational processes in the U.S, Señora Joaquín found it helpful to rely on the counselor to help them select which schools to apply to. Now, Señora Joaquín is thinking about which of the schools her son should enroll in. One of her biggest factors is affordability. “Uno como padre, a veces busca uno lo de lo económico.” (As a parent, sometimes we look for the economic factor.) However, her and her husband are inspired by their son, so they are letting him have the final decision. “Apoyamos a nuestro hijo en lo que él quiera. Si se quiere ir lejos, si se quiere ir cerca, que a él le guste. Porque él es el que va a estudiar, verdad? No vamos a buscarle nosotros la universidad que nosotros queramos, sino que una universidad a la que él quiera para que le eche ganas...Mi esposo, él dice ‘mijo en la que tú quieras. Le hacemos cómo le hacemos, pero tú escoges. Tú decidas la que tenga la carrera que tú quieras estudiar.’”

(We support our son in whatever he wants. If he wants to go far, if he wants to go nearby, whatever he links. Because he’s the one that’s going to study. We aren’t going to look for a university we want, but rather a university he wants to attend so that he’s motivated to put in effort. My husband says ‘Son, go to the one you want. We will make it work but you decide. You decide the school that has the career you want to study.’)

And although Señora Joaquín and her husband want to fully support their son 's college dreams, those dreams can be expensive.

Her son also worries about affordability. Since he is not eligible for FASFA, he’s been on his computer searching and applying to outside scholarships. The finances have made this process stressful for the entire family. There have been times when he finds out he’s been accepted to a school, and there’s only a brief moment of smiling and cheering until he looks at the financial aid letter. Then everyone’s hearts drop.

“Mi hijo aplicó para la universidad y lo aceptaron. Y pues se emocionó porque lo aceptaron. Pero ya cuando vio el precio, ya dicen ‘no, mami. Es muchísimo dinero.’” (My son applied to a university and they accepted him. He got excited that he got accepted. But then once he saw the price, he said ‘no, mom. It’s too much money.)

Still, Señora Joaquín is hopeful there is a college that her son likes and that they can afford. She dreams that all of her children continue their education and go to college.

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“Sería una esperanza muy bonita en que mis hijos pudieran seguir estudiando.” (It would be a beautiful hope that my children can continue their education.)

One year later

Currently in 2026, her son is now a 1st year college student at a private university in Chicago. He is following his medical dreams and is studying nursing.

Señora Joaquín’s Hopes for the field

For High Schools

- **Support students more directly with scholarships and affordability.** *“Ayudar a los estudiantes para que apliquen a becas.”* (Help students apply to scholarships). Her son has been diligently applying for scholarships but yet he has not been accepted to any. Although she is grateful that the school counselor has offered lists of different scholarships, she hopes for there to be more direct support to students to navigate the scholarship application process. Since for her son, his college dreams are so tied with affordability, getting accepted to college isn’t enough when he can’t afford it. *“Sería una buena opción que les apoyan más en cómo aplicar, y cómo hacerle para que pues los acepten.”* (It’d be a good option to offer more help in how to apply and how to improve their applications so that they get accepted).

For Universities

- **Have a point that families can contact.** *“Saber a quién ir con quién recurrir si hay más apoyo.”* (Know who to go to, who to ask questions and look for more support) As Señora Joaquín navigated the college application process, she wondered if there was anyone at the universities her son applied to that she could go to for questions. She thought it was strange how there was a point person she could go to from the high school side, but no one she could find to contact at the 5 universities her son applied to. She recommends universities admission offices to make an active effort to introduce themselves to parents so that she could learn more about the school and on how to better support their child. This connection can facilitate a more thorough decision making process and to help families learn more about potential available resources. For parents like Señora Joaquín, it

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would also be helpful if there was a person on the university side that speaks Spanish.