>> Hello and welcome. My name is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, and I'm the proud president of RespectAbility, a nonprofit organization that is working to fight stigmas and advance opportunities for people with disabilities. I'm delighted today to be working with some fantastic partners from RespectAbility, World Enabled, and Fiesta Educativa. I also want to thank the sponsors of this work who have been incredibly helpful.

Let me start by saying that the Coca-Cola Foundation, along with Vincenzo Piscopo at their foundation, have been an extraordinary champion of girls with disabilities. Vincenzo himself has lived the disability experience and is a wonderful model for all of us. Thank you to Coca-Cola for your support and thank you to the New York Women's Foundation which is advancing opportunities for women and girls, particularly in New York.

We do know that so many of those girls are from the Latinx community. This is exciting information that has been put together by the co-authors that you're about to meet. But I also want to acknowledge that our national leadership fellows from multiple cohorts, and their names are listed on the screen along with our staff who have diligently worked hard for this project. Thank you also to the Ford Foundation, Alexander Foundation and others for making the fellowships possible.

I also want to point out some key statistics before we introduce you to the speakers.

First of all, there's such a large number of people with disabilities at all age ranges. But so many of them have invisible disabilities. We have the total number of Latinx community members who are in this country. They are broken down by the different kinds of disabilities whether it's visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive or self-care. There's a number of different kinds of disabilities in this country. Members of the Latinx community with a disability have an employment rate that's significantly lower than able bodied people in the same community. We're deeply concerned about that and we know that one of the most important things that we can do is to ensure that they have a great start with their families, with their parents, and with their public schools.

I want to also point out that this particularly impacts the states of California, Texas, Florida, and New York where there are very large Latinx and Hispanic populations. Some of those numbers are here. What you see is that they account for roughly 12% of students in America who are being served as students with disabilities.

I want to point out that it actually should be more than 12%. The is because more than 12% of students in America are Latinx students. The fact that only 12% are served with special education services means they're not always getting the diagnosis, the accommodations and services they need not only to survive but to thrive.

What we also see is a low graduation rate which is very problematic obviously. Plus, many of the students with disabilities have invisible disabilities. This is important to some extent. People who have a visible disability such as they are blind or deaf or they use a wheelchair, and they typically have it easier in school. People see that it's obvious that they have a disability.

However, some people have an invisible disability such as a mental health disorder. I myself have an invisible disability, I'm dyslexic and I have ADHD. Sometimes people think they have a language barrier and don't get the services and support they need to thrive.

Now I'm going to turn it over to our co-authors. RespectAbility is a “nothing about us without us” organization. That means that we believe very strongly, and there's a lot of evidence to support this, that the most success comes when the people closest to problems are thoroughly involved in leading the solutions and coming up with the ideas. It's clear what this guide needed to be read completely by people from the Latinx community and done by those with deep, deep disability experience.

 So, Dr. Victor Pineda, a world known expert on disability issues, and Stephanie Farfan, who herself is a little person, are a tremendous advocate on behalf of Spanish speakers with disabilities. Paola has experience in being a parent of a child with disability as well as being a high performing professional advocating in Spanish in her work life. So, she really has learned a lot about how to advocate for children with disabilities. And I also want to thank our partners over at Fiesta Educativa, particularly Edith who helped contribute to this guide.

I'm going to turn it over to the team and Stephanie who is going to start going through this important material

>> So research respect has a Spanish section where we have defined various disabilities throughout our website. You can see here some of them…and then it continues on. We have also profiles on various celebrities with disabilities, particularly Latino celebrities. Michelle Rodriguez, Gina Rodriguez, Selena Gomez, and Frida Kahlo. We are highlighting important people with disabilities.

>> And I'm going to pass it over to Paola so we can begin.

>> Hello to everyone. It's a pleasure to be here. We're going to summarize ten tips to, you know, let the clients know what they can do when they have a child with disability. There are some, you know, tips that you can apply with your child.

First, you have to recognize that your child with a disability is capable and can change the world absolutely. You need to create a network of support. It's very important. It's very important to have, you know, someone to help us to reach our potential.

We need to promote our child's independence. They can do it. And they can do it independently. Of course, they will need your support in a lot of things, but you have to work towards their independence.

Please, you have to create a team with the teachers and with the professors. You and the client and the teachers. It's very important. You have to meet with them to make an individual education plan. Try to be a team with them. And I'm going to get into everything and then Victor and Stephanie will go.

Please participate in your child's learning. This is very important that you get involved. Anything that has to do with learning. Stephanie?

>> Okay. So, there's three main laws that affect students with disability. IDEA, American Rehabilitation Act and the American with Disabilities Act. It's important that you understand what each law does. So, you can better advocate for your child and hopefully your child will learn to advocate for his or herself. IDEA is primarily involved with IEP. That is a specialized education. That is special education. IEPs only include specific disabilities which only deal with educational performances or ability to learn and benefit from general education curriculum. And there's a plan for access at home, which is any child with any disability who might be limited in a basic life activity like learning or accessing anything in school would fall under there.

It's important to know which plan your child falls under and familiarizing yourself with the rights granted to your children under the ADA.

And also, it's important to learn who the experts in your communities are and meet with them, contact them which I know can be difficult. Sometimes people may not have the resources to do so. And that's the point when you should reach out to schools. They're the ones that are primarily going to be able to advise you on access issues, specialized education alternatives and opportunities that there may be.

And also remember the phrase, “nothing about us without us:”. I know Jennifer said it but it's important to remember. This should be the motto of the disability community. And it's always important to connect with your child so the child can have a perspective as well. Because their views are the most important view. And I'm going to pass it over to Dr. Victor Pineda.

>> Thank you, Stephanie and thank you Jennifer for inviting us to be co-authors on this very important resource.

I think it's important to remind ourselves that nobody is given instructions about disability. And I think that to be able to develop a set of recommendations or ideas, suggestions are a good way to pass on the wording.

But I also became a father of a child with significant learning disabilities as well. So I bring in my own experience and reflecting on the ways that my own parents raised me and the ways that I have wanted to be supported by my parents and the ways that I can support my own child.

So that's why these next few tips are really important to bring together the core idea of the whole toolkit. Which is that be involved in your son or daughter's activities. It's not just in the classroom and checking their homework but understanding what the friendships are like. Understanding addressing bullying. Understanding there could be a… it doesn't have to be overwhelming. But they know that you are there if they need you.

There's a fine line between present and creating a - a child to grow up on their own. And don't worry, your child will know you're always there for them.

I think a lot of parents in the disability community like, have a frustration that their child might be growing up too quickly and have them making some mistakes. What I always tell the parents is that it's through those moments of developing yourself and self-awareness, is an opportunity for learning and really growing

The ninth tip is to nurture, get positive disability identity. I think that basically society has a disability community in English with a long history of advocacy. And we have developed advocates that are role models. But we don't celebrate it in the Hispanic and Latino communities- the role models that transcend identities. I think that a person in the community could also be a person with a disability and can be a role model for younger people, younger folks.

I want to show that any difficulties of these by itself is not going to be a barrier. So, any positive stories and understanding that you can learn more that have made an impact on this country. It's really important to give yourself a chance to say, “you know, if she can do it, so can I.”

Recognize the challenges that you might think also comes with incredible gift and remarkable experience. I want to recognize the challenges and celebrate the successes of our children. That means that every day find a way to push further and develop confidence and self-esteem. To build a new friendship. It's those experiences that give you the sense of identity and leads you towards the path of success.

So, it's about not being labeled by the disability, but understanding that there will be challenges along the way and celebrating every time one of those barriers is overcome. And celebrate the role with joy as well as the problems. This is not just about having a difficult, boring life. It's about being part of society.

So, in schools and out of schools— as we think about this toolkit, when we think about that, you know, each one of us has a story. As a story-- the story is flavored by your culture and background and your experience. And the Latinx community is really a vibrant and a very active in a variety of discussions.

We want the discussion of disability and inclusion to really resonate in this community as well. We will be doing the same seminar, the same webinar in Spanish to reach all of you. I have been tweeting out and continue to tweet out these texts in both Spanish and English as Victor Pineda as world enable as world RespectAbility.

I want to invite you to join us on this process. Because this is not just for people with experience developing a tool. It's about a group of people in an organization that serves the population that we identify with. We are stronger when we work together. And-- ( Speaking Spanish ) Let us work together and create a future where we all have a brighter future. Thank you so much for joining us today. We want to really engage you in the dialogue. So, we'll open up for questions now to the people that are here or online. Stephanie, would you like to take over the computer?

>> Does anyone have any questions? Yes?

>> So, there's a lot of-- that are parents with children that are similar-- is there a lot of information in this book for the students themselves. How they can best attain the education and accommodations that they have-- [inaudible]

>> Will you repeat the question for people online?

>> So, if I heard you correctly, the question is, “are there any tools in the toolkit for students with disabilities to better advocate for themselves?” And yes, I think there are.

So, #6 which is know your rights. I think that every student should know that their rights are under not only the ADA, not only understand IDEA or the rehabilitation act but just in general. You should know what your Counties are saying that you can access, what their policies are.

Your parents aren't the only ones that should know this. They're probably the ones who do the research. Because a middle school child won't be able to do this. But I think the onus on the parents to do the research and share it with the children especially because children are young. They may not have the resources to do this.

But I think a lot of these tips really reflect what students should know to be better advocates. Even #10, “recognize the challenges and celebrate successes”. Every child, whether you have a disability or not should learn to recognize when they can’t face a challenge. When you can't do something, don't focus on what you can't do. Just recognize maybe you can't could this. But celebrate what you can. And that's a tip for any student, any child.

And I think a lot of these, you're the parents, a lot of them reflect on the children as well.

>> Are there any educational resources to obtain that can further children when looking at perhaps for example, college?

>> Okay. So, um, the question is, are there any resources to obtain that information once you start falling into college or once you start looking at that if you're a student with a disability. Did I get that right?

>> Yes.

>> okay, yes there are. What they're doing now, what a lot of me and other little people have done is we've created Facebook groups and advocacy groups, not just Facebook but other social media just like posting in links so everyone has these resources.

And I know for a lot of other young people with disabilities where we like flock down the line to provide these resources. But there are organizations right here you can see a lot more resources and things like that. It's a great resource. All their information is in English and Spanish and technical and legal information in navigating schools. And a lot of it can be applied to university as well. Any other questions?

>> I've got a question for Kenneth-- both Paola and Stephanie. For Paola, I'm curious, what advice would you have for a young parent who is beginning that journey of understanding what their child disability is? And Stephanie what advice would you have for young people looking to be the best self-advocate as they could be.

>> Okay, so the question is, what advice do you have for young parents who are beginning their journey in raising a child with a disability and as a follow-up question, what advice would you have for young advocates who are trying to become better at advocacy which is also part of the journey? I'll let Paola take it first.

>> Thank you for your question. I'm going to say, you know, some things that I would love-- and when I (inaudible) He's my child. One of the things I try is to research and investigate to understand what's the diagnosis. What do you think you need to understand about the condition your child has. That's one thing. Try to understand. But don't be overwhelmed because you can find everything on the internet.

You have to be cautious with the information you find. The other one is trying to look for people who have been there before, who have been before in this? Try to ask them questions. Try to, you know, have that networking with them and to -- to feel like getting support and to feel that you are not alone. That's very important.

For me it was very important, you know, that okay, this is something that somebody has been through before. I'm not the only one. For me it was very important to know that this is not so-- I'm not the only one in the world. Because a lot of people go through this.

>> Thank you.

>> Okay. Um, as for becoming a better self-advocate, I would say that the process, you're never going to become the best self-advocate you're going to be. You're never going to do that. It's always a journey. You're always learning new things to better yourself and fight for your rights. It's important to know that activism and advocacy is intertwined. Someone with a disability-- [inaudible] because every small gain you make is a gain for the disability community as a whole and other disability activists. That starts with first accessing your disability identity.

Recognize that you have a disability, accept it and learn love it which is something even the best advocates don't always do. It's always a process. You'll never get to that point where you're completely okay with yourself as someone with a disability. I know I've gone through that. I know other people with disabilities have gone through that. But it's not only learning to advocate for yourself, externally, you might argue with people and say this is what I deserve but also learning and accepting that you do deserve it.

>> So, can I just expand that to Victor, so he can lead to that also. Let me also expand and say, this guy was funded, thanks to Coca-Cola and the New York women's group in terms for women and for girls.

But women take vast majority of the care taking in families and for people with disabilities. So what can women do to get men to be more fully present in the process of advocating for children with disabilities and what is it about being a man with a disability that might be a different perspective?

>> Let me start off, Jennifer, with a very important insight which was that I was raised by my abuela, which is my grandmother, because my mother, when I came to this country, had to work. My mother had the role of the father. And my grandmother had the role of the mother.

In some ways it is quite often the case with immigrant families. And I think there isn't enough support from fathers to really give them the tools to also understand how they can be great partners.

I think this toolkit though is really at the core, focused on the biggest change-- in any society, that's women. I think if we can empower women to have these resources and these tools, and girls specifically girls with disabilities would be every major social movement, every major-- broad leadership, disability movement in women and Chicago Latino women-- Cuban and others that-- Chicano movement-- but really it's ultimately I partnership.

My father was not present in my life. But he did care. He just did not know how to be effective in the day-to-day work. I think that the toolkit, although it's focused on empowering women and sending the message to the movement-- yes we can-- we can raise a child with a disability to be independent, to be part of a society.

We have to remember that each of these community experience their own social construct which are gender, which are also in educational level. Socio-economic level as well as very diverse. I mean, there are over 23 countries with all diverse history inside America. And immigrants that come to this country with a whole different social construct of their identity, national identity, gender identity, and their-- identity.

A lot of things have to be negotiated. Often times the father and the mother become a core conduit in helping shape that identity.

So as a man I've become an ally to the powerful women that are able to charge and just do (inaudible)-- construct partnership that we have with other co-authors to create a beautiful resource and guidance.

We're really excited to share the same content in Spanish in the near future. So we'll be launching this same webinar in Spanish. And we want you all to connect with us so that we can draw a large diverse gathering online to learn this content and continue to share with the various community.

Ultimately identity is cross cultural any group whether it's the Hispanic American, Chamber of Commerce or whether it's network of Latino lawyers, or whether it's a network of doctors, and different professional groups, they all have populations with disabilities. We have an opportunity to really touch these communities across the different groups. So it's not a small isolated group of people. It's a community that touches all other communities as well.

>> Any other questions? From the participants or from the speakers?

>> What kind of research went into compiling these tools or the principle based on the personal experiences of the review. And if so, how did you all come together?

>> So, um, do you mind if I answer that question? Okay. So actually, we work with Edith Espiritu. She is the parent outreach coordinator. She has a lot of experience getting parents or children with disabilities information and resources.

And so, she provided insight into what would have been helpful. And because she is the mother a child with a disability as well. It would have been helpful that she gave us that insight as well. And I also work, when I was volunteering with Little People of America, I primarily did parent outreach for Latino parents of children who had children with dwarfism. So basically, at least what I did is I reached out to my network of parents. I spoke to my own mother. And I got a sense of what they would have wanted when they were starting out their journey.

It was very much qualitative research, interviewing and asking what would have been helpful.

>> What was for the tip, right?

>> Yeah.

>> But tell us about the research that went in it, some of the other harder research.

>> I was not there-- I was not working as part of the RespectAbility team I can't speak to that. I think Philip can speak to that because he was the one controlling all the research. I don't know.

>> With our audience,-- in terms of pulling people together. There are two primary sources for what we did. One is the American community survey. It's a survey done by the census bureau. Every racial demographic group.

The website that (inaudible) (Speaker away from microphone) so we pulled the most important information that people should know. And people need to know it because they need to know they're not alone. They need to know there are people just like themselves.

In terms of the education statistics, we pulled that from the U.S. Department of Education. Every year they track students with disability. We pulled those statistics based on Latinx demographics

>> Remarkable tool. Jennifer, can you tell us why you think these kinds of tools-- like what is the ultimate goal? How do the tool-- [inaudible]

>> They're important pieces of information. When you look at the data, what are some of the key points? #1, is that the majority of students in American public schools today are children of color. The majority of students in America's public schools are children of color. And there were a huge number of them are growing up in homes that speak Spanish the whole time you're in the household.

When the children go to the school, frequently they are not getting the diagnosis, and they're not getting the accommodations that they need to succeed.

And the numbers that are involved. The sheer number of children that are essentially being cast aside by our society is a massive disgrace for our country. And it is going to hamper us significantly economically in the future because these are talented children.

I think one of the biggest mistakes that people make is to think that children with disabilities are incapable when they all have capabilities.

#1 is the large number of children who have capabilities with capabilities essentially being sidelined from the benefit of society. And this affects multiple people who are first the individual with the disability who is harmed because their right is essentially thrown away.

Secondly the society which has denied the benefit of the talents that they can bring to the world. So, this is very significant. And particularly one of the things that's most interesting in the data is that we see this underrepresentation of people with disabilities in the public schools. In other words, there are so many kids who are in a school and what happens is that they have difficulties because English is not their first language. So, if they're not sliding in the classroom, sometimes people say they're lazy or have a bad altitude as oppose to the fact that this is a smart kid who is trying hard who really needs support, so they can succeed.

What happens all too often they get frustrated in the classroom. And they act out. And when they act out they get suspended. When they get suspended they lose so much content in the school and wind up dropping out. A large number of Latino students or Latinx students are dropping out or expelled from school. Where are they going? Those people are going to the prison pipe line.

Look who are incarcerated in America? Women incarcerated tend to be people of color. People of color with disabilities whose disabilities were not addressed.

And a lot of people want to address the criminal justice problem by saying we need different laws about sentencing. But the fact is, even when they're released, if they're released and don't have the literacy or executive functioning skills or mental health services. They're not going to be able to slide in society. We want to go to the root.

When we think about making America a better country, we need to think about the talent of every individual. And that starts with a child. I have, as a parent, a tremendous amount of experience just like Paola about raising a child with a disability. I noticed people they dismiss your child with a disability and move onto other children.

These kids are highlighted in the toolkit they have unlimited capacity for good. What we want to do is spark a revolution. Parents should be demanding the right services and should be engaged with their teachers and students and with their children so that they can have the kind of success that you have as a Ph.D. with a disability and that Stephanie, who is also doing her graduate studies right now, as a person with a disability.

I would point out also that only 7% of children with disability achieve even a college diploma. And almost all of them are white children who are born in America and who are from a two-parent family. And that has got to change because America needs to be a place of opportunity for everyone including people from Spanish speaking families.

>> Thank you, Jennifer. I think what we can do is we can basically say that there is a fundamental imperative, urgency in globalizing attention and resources and taking action.

One way to take action is…what way do you think that we can take action?

>> We take action-- to address--

>> What are possible issues that Jennifer talked about or some of the work directly as a whole with the family or siblings or the-- what actions do you recommend? you know, at different target community.

>> Okay, sorry. As I was saying before, we want this to be an action-oriented toolkit. Jennifer will summarize the policy implications of not having adequate support and what the costs are of excluding kids with disabilities.

The action that Jennifer basically called upon is really to understand that this is a major political issue, major issue in our country that needs to be tackled. What kind of action could you think that young people with self-advocacy should do to have parents or their own schools or community really thrive?

>> So, for young people who are self-advocates, as I said before, I feel like self-advocacy is tied to activism. I think leading more into that advocacy activism, sort of line and not necessarily-- not understanding and--[inaudible]

And just being louder. Being as loud as you can to argue.

>> Why is being louder important in the Latinx community?

>> Being loud is important because a lot of the times, speaking as Latina and speaking for someone who was encouraged to be the loudest in the room. Regardless if I am teaching or writing or aiming to be the loudest voice in any room. I think it's important because many times in our culture and community, their voices are silenced or not as-- there's a saying our community that is children are-- ( Speaking Spanish ) Which is your prettier with your mouth close.

>> (Speaker away from mic) (inaudible) who does not speak out does not get it.

>> It's very much a culture of children to be quiet to be in a different room. Let the adults do everything. And that isn't even just for people with disabilities. It's for everyone.

We all know the stereotype of the Latina mother babying her young son. You move away when you're married. Not necessarily when you are capable of living only your own. And that's true for having the disability. Even more true, there's that belief that, when you have a disability, no matter what kind of disability you have, you will be home until you're old.

>> Let's quickly get feedback from Paola. Paola, your son has significant developmental disability. You know, there's such a-- [inaudible] my parents knew that I could develop my mental capacity, but I would have very, very little physical capacity.

What about in those scenarios where a child can't communicate or isn't able to form their own dictation. How do you think this-- how do you think this respective also needs to be strengthened and reimagined? (inaudible)

>> Yes, exactly. Once I think what we parents have to worry-- our children are not-- it's not easy for them to be advocate for themselves. I think we should try to help them to weigh their skills and ability. For example, in my case, my son is very good with music and dance. He's not very good in writing or maybe reading.

His talent is dancing. (inaudible) . So, we have to, you know, to take the most of this kind of ability. Believe me, everyone has something they're good with.

So, I think we have to try to train those skills-- don't focus on the things they can't do. Or maybe they're not so good at. And focus on the things that they plan to be better at.

And also, for us, success, for me to be [inaudible] what is success? What -- for one person, maybe it means to have a wonderful job, to have a lot of money, to have a big house. Of course, we can accept that.

I think, for me in my case, success is to be a good human being living independent enough to the day that I'm not going to be there-- [inaudible]. For me that's success.

Try to-- for me it's a plus to have him because I can understand that the world is not only one way. The world is so different. For me it's all those things.

>> Thank you. We heard a lot of different perspectives to the testament to where the diverse communities are. But there is no--[inaudible]. I want to encourage everybody to continue to follow RespectAbility on Twitter and on Facebook. I want to encourage you to look up and download and share this toolkit. Think about your communities and the way that you engage. And hopefully elevate a clear set of expectation and higher sense of possibilities. Thank you, Jennifer, for doing this gathering.

>> I want to thank Victor Pineda. I want to thank Paola and Stephanie. I want to thank our partners at Fiesta Educativa funders New York Women's Foundation and Coca-Cola for making this possible.

We're beginning this journey and we believe in nothing about us without us. We're looking for more people in the Latinx community who will join us in this work and as many allies we can have. RespectAbility is looking to hire people from the Latinx community in New York and the greater Los Angeles area. We also have a national fellowship program that is in the Washington DC area. We encourage people from the Latinx community who are bilingual to apply particularly those people with disability experience.

What we see is not going to be a sprint. It's going to be a marathon. But we have three champions with us today who brought this toolkit forward and our partners in California. I could not be more grateful to each of you for the extraordinary work.

Everybody can find these resources on our website at RespectAbility.org. There is a whole section in Español. Look for the Español resources on our website and do follow us on social media. We are looking for volunteers. And we're so delighted to have these three heroes with us today.

thank you for those here in person and online and on the phone. We wish you all much success. Thank you very much.

>> Thanks. [applause].