School Experiences of Latina/o Students: A Community-Based Study of Resources, Challenges, and Successes
Part I

Judy Marquez Kiyama, Ph.D.
Donna M. Harris, Ph.D.
Nancy Ares, Ph.D.
Amalia Dache-Gerbino
Sandra Quiñones
Monica L. Miranda Smalls
Thomas Noel
Anibal Soler
Emily Martinez Vogt

Ibero-American Action League:
A Call to Action

- In response to the low levels of educational attainment Ibero convened a Latino Youth Task force in December 2008 to address the issue of student dropouts.
- The invisibility of Latina/o students has been a major concern of Ibero. Concerns about Latina/o students have been documented in two major reports.
  - A 1986 Rochester City School Access for Hispanics to Opportunities Results in Achievement (AHORA) report states 70% of Latina/o students dropped out in grades 9, 10 and 11.
  - The 1999 AHORA report reveals that relationships with Latina/o families and the district were fractured.
Latina/o Education in Rochester

- Latina/o students made up 22% of the student population in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) during 2008-2009.
  - 68% of Latina/o 6th graders in 2008-2009 compared to 47% in 2007-2008 scored a 3 or 4 on the English Language Arts exam.
  - At the secondary-level, 47% of the Latina/o cohort scored a 3 or 4 on the English exam in 2008-2009 compared to 42% of Latina/o cohort members in 2007-2008.
- In 2008-2009 Latina/o students had a 47% graduation rate compared to a 52% graduation rate for all RCSD high school students.

Research Questions

- What are the critical transition points for Latina/o students in the Rochester City School District?
- What contributes to the development of educational aspirations of Latina/o students?
Data Collection: RCSD Student Records

- Longitudinal school record database for all 6th and 9th graders from 2003-2004 to 2006-2007
  - Information about enrollment status, grade level status, attendance, grades, and test scores.
- In 2003-2004 there were 767 Latina/o 6th graders out of 4,667 students in the RCSD.
- In 2003-2004 there were 898 Latina/o 9th graders out of 4021 students in the RCSD.

Data Collection: Focus Groups

- Bilingual Focus Groups (Nov. 2009 – April 2010)
  - 31 focus groups
  - 9 community sites
  - 95 students (ages 11-18)
  - 41 parent/guardians
  - Students represented:
    - 7 high schools (including several schools within schools)
    - 3 of the local higher education institutions
    - Former RCSD students (either transfer or drop-out)
    - Most of the participants identified as Puerto Rican
Main findings

- Findings fall into the following categories:
  - Drop-out
    - Personal Factors
    - School Factors
    - Environmental Factors
  - Persistence
    - Personal Factors
    - School Factors
    - Environmental Factors
  - Transition Factors
  - Educational Aspirations

Elementary/Middle Grade Level Transitions

As Latina/o students progressed from elementary grades to middle grades between 2003-2004 and 2006-2007, greater numbers of students did not move onto their expected grade levels.

- In 2004-2005
  - 94% were in 7th grade as expected and 6% were below grade level
- In 2005-2006
  - 66% were in 8th grade as expected and 34% were below grade level
- In 2006-2007
  - 68% were in 9th grade as expected and 32% were below grade level
High School Grade Level Transitions

Latina/o high school students also confronted challenges in moving into their expected grades between 2003-2007.

- In 2004-2005
  - 65% were in 10th grade as expected
  - 34% were below grade level
- In 2005-2006
  - 47% were in 11th grade as expected
  - 49% were below grade level
- In 2006-2007
  - 52% were in 12th grade as expected
  - 48% were below grade level

Departure Trends

- Latina/o high school students tended to leave school at higher rates compared to elementary school students.
  By the end of the 2003-2004 academic year 24% (n=219) of the 898 Latina/o students at 9th grade exited RCSD including:
    - 7% (n=58) either dropping out or leaving the RCSD to obtain a GED and
    - 7% (n=58) leaving to attend a non-public school or a school outside of the district or state.
    - 6% (n=55) of Latina/os 9th graders were expunged from school rosters as a result of obtaining 20 consecutive, unexcused absences, and
    - 4% (n=48) were no longer enrolled in RCSD because of expulsion, being a no show to a RSCD school, departure from the United States, or other reasons including placement in reform school, youth home, jail, or mental institution.
Drop-out Trends

• Between 2006 and 2009 the dropout rates for Latina/o students had decreased.
  – In 2006 48% of Latina/o students were dropouts after 4 years of entering high school.
  – In 2009 36% of Latina/o students were classified as dropouts after 4 years of entering high school.
• Since it takes some students longer to make it through high school, dropout rates increase for each year a student does not graduate.
  For Latina/os in the class of 2007
  – 32% had dropped out after 4 years of high school.
  – 42% had dropped out after 5 years of high school.
  – 47% had dropped out after 6 years of high school.

Graduation-Dropout Gaps

For Latina/os in the class of 2007
– 36% graduated vs. 32% had dropped out after 4 years of high school.
– 44% graduated vs. 42% had dropped out after 5 years of high school.
– 46% graduates vs. 47% had dropped out after 6 years of high school
Drop-out Factors

- Safety in Schools
  - In school suspension procedures
  - Surveillance features and failures
  - Culture of violence and hostile relations
- Structural and Organizational Factors
  - Availability of bilingual programs
  - Use of public transportation
  - Schools within schools
- Racial & Ethnic Tensions
  - Racial bias from teachers
  - Tensions between Black and Latina/o students

Drop-out Factors: Violence

*I got jumped by seventh, eighth and ninth graders earlier in the year with padlocks. They took the padlocks off their gym lockers and all of them beat me like that. They got suspended, but they should've gotten long-term. They didn't get long-term, they came back – within a month they came back. I know they had the padlocks, but I beat them even though they had the padlocks. So I didn't care, my face wasn't messed up. I really wasn't scared about it because – I don't know. I mean they're dangerous, I know one of them could've killed me if they knocked me in the head hard enough.*
Drop-out Factors: Bilingual Resources

At Edison – about five or six [students] that came straight off the island, not speaking a word of English. Edison Tech itself does not have a bilingual program and these students have to depend on agencies to come in and help them… These children were forced to come to this school because Monroe or other schools that do offer the bilingual education were too full. They were already at capacity. So, these students come here basically setting themselves up for failure because there’s no support anything like that as far as translating the schoolwork.

Drop-out Factors: The Bus

Student 1: I know the bus is really bad. Like, I know a lot of people that won’t go to school because of the bus…They hate the bus – the RTS. They just hate it. They can’t, because like I don’t know. That’s why I never used to go to school. I don’t know why, but I just didn’t go to school because of the bus. I just didn’t wanna be on it in the morning.

Interviewer: Because things happen on the bus, or because it’s not on time?

Student 2: Different bus drivers. Some come early. You’ll miss your bus. They’ll come late. You won’t go to school, because there are not enough buses. There’s fights, arguments. All they do is pull over, and wait for the people [to stop].
Transition Factors

• Transition experiences influenced by:
  – Circular Migration
  – Socioeconomic
  – Sociolinguistic
  – Cultural Adaptation Factors

Transition Factors: Circular Migration

I was born in Puerto Rico, came to live in Rochester when I was four. Around when I was eight I moved to Syracuse and then two years later I came back when my grandma died. And then ever since I’ve been living here in Rochester.
Transition Factors:
Adaptation & Acculturation

Es un cambio brusco, porque este ambiente, el clima...el idioma, entonces muchas veces...mira yo no me imaginaba que hubiese tanto racismo aquí sinceramente porque son bien racistas la gente y con los Hispanos, con los LATINOS son bien racistas y se ve en el trato...Son bien...porque en Puerto Rico, hay blancos, negros y todos nos tratamos iguales, y cuando uno viene aquí es totalmente diferente y entonces para mi fue bien difícil y frustrante y para los nenes también.

Persistence Factors

• Community & School-based Programs
  – Confianza (mutual trust)
  – Professional, academic & personal development
  – Incentives for staying in school
  – Cultivation of ability and confidence and opportunity for students to help other students
  – Opportunity to be with Latina/o community while also expanding out and meeting others from different cultures and race/ethnicities
  – Opportunity for students to develop their own “voice,” their individual agency and advocacy.
• Influence on Educational Aspirations
Interviewer 1: Entonces si sacas PRYD, si sacas Hillside, y estas aqui en [la escuela] y quieres hablar con alguien…
(Then, if you take away PRYD, if you take out Hillside, and you are here in [the school] and you want to speak to someone.)

Student 1: No tienes a nadien.
(You don’t have anyone.)

Interviewer 2: Si no esta [program mentor] con quien habia?
(If it’s not [program mentor] who do you talk to?)

Student 2: Nadie. (No one.)
Persistence Factors

Like, a lot of my friends were in gangs and what not, doing horrible things, and for a long time, I felt like that’s what I wanted with my life. So, that was like my life at one point in time until like I met my mentor, and he sorta changed my perspective on life, … Yeah, so I met my mentor… So, he sorta like showed me like there’s nothing wrong with being a smart guy.

Recommendations

• Conduct RCSD reviews of:
  – In school suspension policies
  – Surveillance & security policies
  – Bilingual program availability, resources & expansion
  – How students are accounted for over time
• Include programming based on:
  – Violence
  – Social justice & inclusivity
• Work to create community and/or school-based program opportunity available in every school
Conclusion

• Latina/o student drop-out and persistence is a process influenced over time.
• Latina/o student drop-out and lack of transition is the responsibility of the entire community.
• All recommendations must be inclusive of families and students in the review, development and implementation processes.
• Report marks the beginning of continuing the collective discussions, briefs, forums and action!

Contact Information

Judy Marquez Kiyama, Ph.D.
(585) 276-4779
jkiyama@warner.rochester.edu

Donna M. Harris, Ph.D.
(585) 276-3186
dharris@warner.rochester.edu