ABSTRACT
                A study was done by student researchers of Latino
high school students' perspectives on the Latino dropout problem.
Four large, zoned high schools with few selective programs and with
substantial numbers of Latinos (23 percent to 43 percent) were
selected. Two of these high schools had high and two had low Latino
dropout rates. Approximately 60 Latino students were interviewed and
surveyed at each school, making for a total sample of 240 students.
Students represented various academic levels and school grades and
included Limited English Proficient (LEP) and non-LEP students.
Substantial differences were found between the two types of schools
with regard to students' perceptions of the following school traits:
school spirit, teachers' and counselors' cultural sensitivity to
Latinos, students' likes and dislikes, how students would change
their schools, how different student racial groups get along, how
schools handle university opportunities, and the extent to which
schools encourage parental involvement. The data also indicate that
the schools do not differ substantially with regard to why students
think Latinos drop out; how they view the school's handling of
truancy and cutting of classes; and how Latino student groups got
along. Includes recommendations, copies of the survey form in English
and Spanish, and 2 class reading lists citing 99 references.
(Author/JB)

VOLUME II

STUDENT VOICES:

High School Students' Perspectives

on the Latino Dropout Problem

ED359286

Report of the Fordham University; College At Lincoln Center

Student Research Project*

Prepared by

Dr. C. E. Rodriguez
Professor

Submitted to

The Latino Commission on Educational Reform

Subcommittee on the Causes and Solutions to Latino Dropout

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*The student researchers were: Laura Castillo, Carlos Cruz,
Elizabeth Garcia, Mario Hyacinth, Cynthia A. Mustafa, Elizabeth
Medina, Gillian Navarro, Marisol Parra, and Wilson Valentin.

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was Latino high school students' perspectives on the Latino drop out problem. The research was conducted in conjunction with the Latino Commission and the Board of Education by Dr. Clara E. Rodriguez and students at Fordham University's College At Lincoln Center.

Method: Four large, zoned high schools with few selective programs and with substantial numbers of Latinos (23%-43%) were selected. Two of these high schools had high, and two had low, Latino dropout rates. Approximately 60 Latino students were interviewed and surveyed at each school, making for a total of 240 students. Students represented various academic levels, school grades and included LEP and non-LEP students.

Summary of Findings: Substantial differences were found between the two types of schools with regard to students' perception of the schools': school spirit, teachers and counselors' cultural sensitivity to Latinos, students' likes and dislikes, how students would change their schools, how different student racial groups get along, how schools handle university opportunities, and the extent to which schools encourage parental involvement. We also found that the schools do <u>not</u> differ substantially with regard to why students think Latinos drop out; how they view the school's handling of truancy and cutting of classes; and how Latino student groups got along. Recommendations and a "call to action" conclude the report.

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INTRODUCTION

The Latino Commission on Educational Reform was established by the Board of Education in the fall of 1991 to ensure that the growing numbers of Latino students are receiving appropriate, quality instruction in conditions conducive to education and to make recommendations that would help the Board to fulfill its commitment to Latino students. The Latino Commission on Educational Reform established, as one of its subcommittees, the Committee on the Causes and Solutions to the Latino Dropout Crisis in New York City. This Committee, in conjunction with Dr. Clara Rodriguez, a Professor at Fordham University's College At Lincoln Center and a member of the Commission, undertook a research project to investigate the Latino dropout problem. Four high schools -- two of which had low Latino dropout rates and two of which had high Latino dropout rates -- were the focus of the research.

A subsequent, but key, component of this study was the role of young Latino undergraduate students at Fordham University's College At Lincoln Center. As fairly recent high school graduates, these students facilitated rapport with high school students and brought unique insights into the problems facing Latino students in New York City high schools. They also provided valuable input into the construction of the survey instruments used. The time and energy that they contributed enhanced the project immeasurably and gave it the unique student perspective which it has. Latino

Commission staff, members of the Committee on the Causes and Solutions to the Latino Dropout Crisis, other Latino Commission members and staff of the Board of Education also contributed to the development of the research project.

This report is organized in the following fashion: The "Introduction" gives a general overview of the background and purpose of the research study. The "Methodology" section describes the review of the literature, the identification of important themes, the research design, the methods used to select the high schools, the sample within each school, the process leading to the development and design of the questionnaires, a description of the staff, training, and observations on the school visits. The next section compares the Fordham students' impressions at each of the schools. This is followed by an analysis of what the high school students said at each school. This section is organized according to themes that we identified in our literature review. A section on "Summary Statements" ensues and this is succeeded by "Conclusions and Recommendations." The report ends with an "Epilogue."

METHODOLOGY

Review of the Literature

The research project proceeded as follows. Based on the materials distributed by the Latino Commission Chair and staff, a six-page bibliography was constructed (See Appendix 1 for

Bibliography). From this bibliography, those works specifically relevant to the Latino dropout problem and those studies that identified factors critical to the success or failure of Latinos were designated. These, plus others that were added, served as the core readings for the literature review. (See Appendix 2) Students in the research project were assigned to read all articles but were specifically responsible for facilitating discussion and bringing up key points within specific articles. In looking at the extensive literature, the group evaluated the method, sample, and findings, and determined which works would be useful in answering the question of why Latinos drop out.

As the review of the articles proceeded, the focus became the determination of which factors led to successful Latino student participation in high school and which encouraged Latino high school students to complete their education. In other words, having developed a fairly good idea of why Latinos dropped out, we commenced to ask what factors encourage Latinos to stay in school.

It is perhaps worthwhile to explain in more detail the reasoning for this shift from dropping out to staying in school, i.e., from studying failure to studying success. There are a number of generally accepted correlates for Latino dropout, e.g., pregnancy, being left-back, low socioeconomic status, gender, family structure and size, low educational attainment of parents, low english proficiency, low academic ability and achievement, illness, peer influence, low degree of social integration (Rumberger, 1987; Peng, 1985). However, many of these "correlates"

are symptomatic, situation-specific, or, background factors over which most schools have little control.   They told us little about how we could propose or develop policies to alter the environment of schools so that fewer students become first "at risk" students and then part of the drop-out statistics. In other words, to say that students dropout because they fall behind in their grades, become pregnant, or are "into" drugs is not a sufficient or illuminating explanation. Many of these "correlates" reflect behavior that has been in the making for a long time. We need to know why students fall behind, begin taking drugs or get pregnant in the first place. We need policies to prevent this, not just programs to manage or contain these problems. We also need to know why among youth in the same schools, from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and family structures, some manage to stay and succeed in school while others drop out. In essence, we need to establish what schools can do to lower the incidence of school leaving among Latino youth.

Having thus established this focus, we reviewed the literature with an eye toward identifying those school characteristics that were associated with Latino student success.   This laborious process involved the analogous development of relevant questions (described below). We eventually arrived at a number of common motifs that the literature showed were associated with successful educational experiences for Latinos. We added additional questions that came from various sources, e.g., the Board of Education's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment. The resultant set

of variables we decided to investigate are listed below:

- the general "spirit" in the school;

- the student's overall opinion of his/her school;

- the extent of sensitivity to Latino cultural differences;

- the way in which truancy and cutting of classes were handled by the school;

- the extent of parental involvement;

- the student's clarity of academic goals and perceived assistance from the school;

- student motivation and aspiration levels and student's source of inspiration;

- influence on student choice of school;

- safety and order in the school as well as outside of school, and the role of Security in maintaining this;

- student perception of school staff's cultural sensitivity to Latinos, i.e., teachers, principal and counselors, and security;

- perception of the application of fair principles in t.e schools; and,

- the role of extra-curricular activities in the school.

The variables that will be analyzed in this report are those which were addressed in the discussion with high school students. These are: school spirit, cultural sensitivity, race and ethnic relations, expectations and university opportunities, truancy and "cutting class," and parental involvement. Our hypothesis was that

these variables would distinguish successful schools from schools
that were not successful with Latino students. By looking at these
variables from the high school students' perspective, we would be
able to distinguish a positive learning environment for Latino
students from a negative one. If so, we might be able to begin to
address the Latino dropout problem within a more targeted, systemic
and preventive perspective.

We also included general questions that solicited student
views on why Latinos drop out, what their ideal school would be and
what they liked least and worst about their school. Finally, there
were also demographic control variables, such as grade level and
high school average, gender, and racial/ethnic identity, so that we
could subsequently examine the data by these variables.

Research Design

The original idea for the research design came from one of the
meetings of the Committee on the Causes and Solutions to the Latino
Dropout Crisis. It was suggested that an in-depth analysis of
contrasting high schools, i.e., where Latinos had low, and where
they had high, dropout rates, would be useful in explaining the
causes and solutions to the dropout problem. It was clear, given
our resources and time, that no more than four high schools could
be visited. As will be explained below, a dual approach was taken
wherein both a structured, self-administered questionnaire and a
series of discussion questions were utilized during the school
visits. The idea was to identify factors that appeared to
contribute to and those that discouraged Latinos from dropping out

of school.

Selection of the Schools

The decision as to which four schools to visit was made in the
following way. At the request of the Committee on the Causes and
Solutions to the Latino Dropout Crisis, a listing was compiled by
the Board of Education of all the public high schools in New York
City by Latino dropout rate. This listing classified the type of
schools (e.g., academic, vocational, specialized) and it also
included the percentage of students who were Latino, the total
number of students in the school, the number of "educational
option" seats, and Black and White dropout rates in each school.

Two subsequent lists were drawn from this list, one ranking
the schools with the highest Latino dropout rates, and the other
ranking the schools with the lowest Latino dropout rates. Schools
whose student populations were less than 20% Latino, and those that
were specialized, alternative or vocational high schools, were
omitted from consideration. The Committee decided that vocational
and alternative high schools should be looked at as separate
categories in a later phase of the research.

From these two lists, we utilized the following criteria in
selecting the final four schools. (1) We wanted to compare
schools that were not particularly selective; i.e., the kind of
zoned schools that most Latino students in New York City attend.
(2) We also wanted to look at the schools on the ends of the
continuum, i.e., with the lowest and highest Latino dropout rates.
(3) We wanted schools that were large, at least over 2000 students

and (4) that had a substantial proportion and numbers of Latino students. In effect, we wanted all four schools to be large, and not selective -- i.e., not having a large proportion of "educational option" students and to have substantial proportions of Latinos. The two schools selected with the lowest Latino dropout rates have enrollments of well over 2700, Latino dropout rates well under 10%, and little or no difference between Latino and White dropout rates. These two schools will be referred to as School A and School B.

From the list that had the highest Latino dropout rates, we used the same criteria, but we were also interested in controlling for the neighborhood in which the school was located. This was because we were interested in testing the thesis that poverty most accounts for students dropping out. (In looking at the list of schools with high Latino drop out rates, it was striking to us that there were a number of schools that were located in middle-class areas.) Thus, we chose a school located in a middle-class area and one which was in a very low-income area. The two schools selected in this category have Latino dropout rates of over 28% and enrollments of over 2700. In addition, for both schools there is a large differential between the Latino dropout rate and the White dropout rate. These two schools will be referred to as School C and School D.

We did not take into account the borough in which a school was located, but it turned out that when we selected our four schools, there was one each in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens.

Sample

Originally, the group had anticipated interviewing a variety
of school personnel, i.e., teachers, principals, counselors,
students, and security. However, other members of the Latino
Commission suggested that in view of the limited time and resources
available, efforts would be maximized if we limited the
interviewing process to students.

We also realized that it would be best to interview students
as our primary data source for this study because it is they who
drop out. They know things that others don't; they know what works
and what doesn't at their schools; they have insights that no one
else does. Their knowledge of the school comes from their
experience, not from what educators say about it. Or, as one
Fordham student succinctly put it: *they know the deal.*

More importantly, as the consumers of schooling, they are in a good
position to evaluate the product.

The intent was to sample as wide a range of students as
possible from each of the schools. We wanted to avoid speaking
__just__ with the "honor students" or those students that are usually
asked to represent the school. We also wanted to make sure that we
spoke with members of certain groups. Therefore, we asked our
Board of Education liaison to convey this interest to high school
principals and explicitly asked to speak to some students: who had
limited English proficiency (LEP); in a wide variety of classes,
from developmental classes to more advanced classes; who were
active in Student Government; who participated in dropout

prevention programs; and who participated in community-based organization programs.

It was decided that 60 students from each school would yield a large enough sample to look at differences between schools and some differences within schools. This number was also manageable from the perspective of our own time constraints. Based on our impressionistic evidence, and the profile of the students by gender, grade and high school average, it appears that we did survey a wide variety of students at each school.

Although we met our targeted number at each school, each school varied in the way in which they secured the sample we had requested. At one school, the names of Latino students were taken from the school roster and were announced over the loud speaker by the Principal and by one of our interviewers. At other schools, classes on Native Language Arts were turned over to us; and still at another school, students were chosen from other classes. At every school, we had to reiterate that we were interested in talking with non-LEP students as well as LEP students, and in a number of instances plans had to be changed to accommodate this request. There seemed to be a general impression that our interest was just in the "bilingual" students, meaning the students who spoke mainly Spanish.

Interaction and rapport between college students and high school students were quite good. Discussion groups varied in size from 5-15, and some discussion sections took place in Spanish.

Questionnaire Design

From the wealth of information gleaned from the literature, the Fordham Student Research Group (hereafter referred to as "the group") developed an initial universe of fifty-four questions. From this universe, twenty-eight questions were chosen as the most relevant to our purpose. About this time, the group received a copy of the questionnaire developed by Prof. Joseph Grannis, et. al. at Columbia University's Teachers College. This questionnaire had already been tested and implemented on at-risk high school students in New York City. After reviewing this questionnaire and comparing it to our own set of questions, it was decided that, in order to augment validity, reliability and comparability, we would substitute a number of the questions in this questionnaire for our own. There were a number of questions that were also developed which addressed bilingual programs and GED programs within the school; however, these were not utilized because we realized that the structures of the bilingual programs in the schools were so varied, that this would have required a separate research study.

Dual Approach: Survey and Discussion Questions:

A decision was also made to utilize a dual approach in the school visits -- one which involved small discussion groups with students and one which allowed students to answer individually and anonymously a structured questionnaire. This required the development of two sets of questions:

(1) a self-administered, structured survey questionnaire

(2) group discussion questions

Both sets of questions also had to be translated into Spanish. (See copies of the three questionnaires in Appendix 3.)

Several factors led to this decision. The first one had to do with time constraints. The interviewers would not have enough time to conduct an extensive set of visits in which all questions could be covered using the group discussion format.[1] Also, it was unlikely that the schools would allow high school students that much time outside of class. The second factor had to do with the content of the questions. Because certain questions were expected to be affected by open discussion and peer pressure (e.g., questions about cutting class) and others might be deemed by some students as confidential (e.g., questions about grade average), it was decided to separate these types of questions into a format that allowed for greater confidentiality and that decreased the time required. It was also thought that a comparison of both the open-ended discussion questions and the multiple choice survey questions would yield greater insight and precision to the analysis.

There were a number of drafts of both questionnaires. At approximately the beginning of February, the first draft of the survey and discussion questions was developed. There was not extensive pretesting of the survey questionnaire, as most of the items on the survey questionnaire had been adopted from the Grannis questionnaire. But some pretesting was conducted by the group on a few high school students to check for errors. In formulating the

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[1] It should be noted that the interviewers were unpaid and had to take time off from their jobs and other school commitments to do the interviewing. Indeed, no one involved with this research project received any direct compensation for their participation.

final version of the questionnaire, the group received input from the Latino Commission staff and the members of the Subcommittee on the Causes and Solutions to the Latino Dropout Crisis.   The questionnaires were then sent to the Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment, the Office of Bilingual Education, and the principals of the schools to be visited.   After some minor revisions, the questionnaire was then re-typed so as to facilitate data inputting. Then, 260 copies were made.

Those questions that were covered during the student discussions will be the focus of this report.   These include questions about: the general "spirit" in the school; the extent of sensitivity to Latino cultural differences; the relationships between racial and ethnic student groups; what students liked, disliked and would change about their school to make it ideal; access to university opportunities; the way in which truancy and cutting of classes was handled by the school; why students drop out of particular schools; and the extent of parental involvement.

Method of Analysis

A qualitative but structured method (described below) was used to analyze the discussion questions.   SPSSX was used to run frequencies and cross-tabs on the survey questions. Chi square was the statistical test used to analyze the data.

The analysis involved the following steps:

> (1) All interviewers took notes, but there was a designated note-taker at each of the discussion groups.

(2) After the visits, interviewers compared their notes on each of the discussion groups to ascertain that they had all heard the same comments from the same discussion group.

(3) Some of the questions were compared across schools in follow-up discussions with students.

(4) Interviewers wrote up their notes on each of the schools they had visited using the following outline:

    (a) impressions of the school;

    (b) what students said at each of the schools by question;

    (c) a summary of what was said at each of the schools, and;

    (d) a comparison of the schools visited.

(5) These nine papers were then compared, question by question and section by section, in order to derive a consensus on each of the questions at each of the schools.

(6) The results on each of the schools were then contrasted and analyzed.

(7) The first draft of the report was then reviewed by the students involved. Corrections and further changes were also made at this point.

(8) It was then submitted to the Latino Commission and reviewed by staff and subcommittee members.

Staff and Training

The project received input and assistance from the Latino Commission and from the Board of Education. It was developed and conducted by nine research assistants and Prof. Rodriguez. These undergraduate Fordham students were carefully selected. They had demonstrated superior academic accomplishments, commitment and interest in the issues at hand, and an ease in interpersonal skills. They then enrolled in an independent research-internship course at Fordham University's College At Lincoln Center. This class met steadily and intensely for three hours a week, on Fridays between 5-8pm. Although the group began to meet in December, it met consistently beginning in January through the first part of April, 1992. Interviewing took place during the student's Spring intercession.

Training of the research assistants was quite intensive. Students, in a very short time, became proficient with the most current and significant literature on Latinos in education. They also were involved in deriving and analyzing the major findings with regard to Latino dropout and success in the schools. In addition, students were also briefed prior to school visits by outside experts from the Board of Education, the Latino Commission and others, on a number of areas, including: the structure and administration of the New York City School system; limited English proficiency students in the public school system; the role of community based organizations in dropout prevention programs; the United Way's program in the schools; and the meaning and

interpretation of data gathered by the Board of Education.

Students also received instruction on conducting group discussion sessions, on handling the survey questionnaires, and on managing the on-site visits; and, they were briefed on the expected protocol when visiting high schools. Role-playing exercises in class facilitated final preparation and determined the roles and approach to be taken by the students. A great deal of time was also spent reviewing various data on the different high schools.

A Word on the School Visits

The school visits proceeded very well. There were generally 4-6 research assistants at each school. Dr. Rodriguez accompanied students on all visits, one staff member of the Latino Commission was in attendance for three visits, and there was a liaison person from the Board of Education at each of the schools.

The school visits followed a general structure. We went through Security to the Principal's Office -- where we were greeted by the Principal, our liaison, and, depending on the school, other instructional personnel (the latter were often related to bilingual programming). At this point, we had an opportunity to ask general questions. Breakfast or lunch was provided, a tour of the school was given, and then we interviewed the students. In some cases, we were able to return to talk with the Principal.

In all of the schools, the visits proceeded without any student problems. Most of the high school students appeared interested and involved in the questions. In one school, there was

what appeared to be a minor upset but it did not involve the students. Our liaison indicated that a teacher had conveyed student concern over the nature of the study. We subsequently went to the teacher's class to do the interviewing and did not find any student concern expressed.

We also noted that, despite good relationships with their teachers, high school students responded differently to the questions depending on whether teachers were present in the classroom or not. In some cases, students were more attentive to the discussion when the teachers were not present in class.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions are often lasting impressions. Although they do not tell the whole story and one cannot generalize based on singular impressions, the first impressions of the Fordham students are nonetheless important to note because they may indicate how other, (younger) Latinos also view the school. We begin first with the schools that are doing well with Latino students.

School A

At School A students were initially impressed with the multiculturalism on display and the positive spirit that permeated the air.

Laura: *"I went to this school expecting great things, since I already knew it was a successful school. I entered without fear; I was just nervous about the interviewing procedures. The*

Principal greeted us kindly and a large breakfast awaited us. The Principal's conference room was filled with multiethnic art, such as drawings, dolls. This had a positive impact on me, even though I wondered if such art was put up just for us. After the Principal spoke proudly of her school, we went on a small tour of the building. As I walked through the hallways, I saw students being told to go to class. I got a sense that students did not cut often or a lot in this school.

"The three groups I was assigned to consisted of LEP students. The experience with these students was great enough to inspire me to teach. The students were so intelligent, friendly, and at the same time proud to be Latinos and bilingual."

Marisol: "When I first arrived at the school, I saw students hanging out in the street; I thought this did not give the school a very good image. But when I entered the school I got a totally different feeling. I saw a school where there was cultural diversity and awareness. There was a lot of interaction between students from various backgrounds. From the Principal, I learned that there were many students with a South American background, and I observed that as well. The school had many LEP students and many bilingual students. They had various programs to assist their bilingual and LEP students, including a special project which offers counseling and support for these students. They also had other programs. All in all, it seemed to be a school that was not only interested in certain aspects of a student but in the entire student and it had a lot of cultural diversity."

Mario: "The first thing I noticed about this school was that the school seemed to be in a good area. There were students hanging around outside the building, but they were relatively

calm and acting the way basic high school students would act.

"The building appeared well-kept upon entering and it seemed alive. Alive not just in the sense of students milling about, but also with regard to the colors inside and the general upkeep of the school. The school did not seem like a prison and, if anything, it seemed like a safe haven for students to learn in.

"The administrative staff of the high school was well-prepared for us. The Principal was effervescent and enthusiastic about not only the school but also the fact that we were visiting it (maybe the Principal was not happy to have us as visitors but she sure made us welcome). Her staff was enthusiastic as well, to a point where you had to wonder just how much of what they were saying was on the level or slightly exaggerated.

"Despite not being 100% sold on all of what the Principal and staff had to say, the bottom line was that they were well-prepared and facilitated our intentions and goals upon entering the school."

As this last student suggests, the extent to which schools facilitated the group's visit was seen by the students as an indicator of how open they were to having the situation of Latinos in their school examined. To a degree, it also was a barometer of how well they were succeeding with Latinos, i.e., what their Latino drop-out rate was.

Positivisim at School A

Liz: *"Upon entering the school, my initial impression was one of confusion...I longed to learn what made this a good school; my first impression did not seem indicative of a good school.*

"When we first spoke to the school's administration, I was impressed by what they said about the school. They spoke with much pride and admiration of the school, its staff and students...The school has a good academic program and the teachers try to interest the students in learning."

To a certain degree, the fact that the Fordham students knew they were going to visit a school that had a __low__ Latino dropout rate may have influenced their first impressions of the school. But the statements from the students also show (1) an awareness of the possibility that they might be positively predisposed (2) a certain cynicism concerning the "show" put on and (3) an ability to see beyond that which is being presented and beyond their possible predisposition.

Taken together, students' first impressions of this school indicate that it shines in terms of its appreciation for cultural diversity, its interest in educating all students, in meeting the needs of bilingual students, its orderliness, its preparedness and its enthusiastic staff.

School B

The second school with a __low__ Latino dropout impressed the students in terms of three areas. (1) the physical plant and location of the school (2) the attitude of the Principal and (3) the multicultural dimension of the school.

Its Facilities and Setting:

Mario: *"This school looks like a school that is set apart from the surrounding community.*

There is a huge chain-link fence that covers the front of the school. The students informed me that this was to ensure that no one wandered into the school off the street. When I got off the train, I walked around the fence and into the school. So much for the chain-link fence.

"The interior of the school was dark and drab grey. During the tour I felt depressed and honestly imagined that I was getting out of a prison. I am glad that I no longer go to high school."

Lisa: "The school campus was totally awesome. It looked like a college campus. The neighboring area was also very nice and it appeared pretty quiet, then again it was nine o'clock in the morning.

"Upon entering the school, we addressed the school security guard and asked for the Principal. I noticed that we could have just walked right by unnoticed. The lockers in the hallway were a bit shady and they appeared to need a new paint job."

Cynthia: "I did not formulate an impression of the school until after the interviewing was over. At that point, I was given a tour of the building, during which the Principal pointed out various projects which were still in their developmental stage. As he spoke of [various new projects], I understood that these projects were a matter of utilizing available space for a new department. However, he did not bring up budgetary concerns. After seeing [the current departments] I was impressed by the plenitude, or rather, the wealth of options offered the student. Because the students were in school for a long day, they are offered the freedom to participate in any of the extra-curricular activities offered in the school...It left me with the impression of why would anyone want to leave this school?"

 The Principal:

Lisa: "We arrived at the Principal's office and were greeted warmly. He handed us the

printed agenda we would be following. The Principal jumped right into talking about how great

the school was, its programs, etc. The most interesting thing he said that struck me was that he

had only recently been appointed Principal but that he had earlier taught at the school and that

he and other staff had children who had graduated from the school. He did a very good job

of organizing several groups of students to come meet with our research group. What I was not

fond of was the fact that the research was scheduled to take place in his office. I felt as though

he was hiding something and did not want us to really get to see the school. I also felt that the

students would be intimidated by being asked questions in the Principals' office (which it

resulted they were not). He later reinforced my theory of trying to keep us in his offices, when

I asked for a quick tour of the building and he raced us through. Of course, he made sure to

let us see the different and unique departments."

Mario: "We were not attended by a staff at this school. The Principal took care of

everything. We did not conduct our discussions with the students in their classrooms. The

Principal called out the names of students on the PA system and our discussions commenced

in his conference room. I thought this might inhibit the students and possibly lead them to

answer less honestly. However, despite their surroundings, I feel that the students were open and

quite frank with their responses.

      "It appeared to me that by handling every aspect of our visit by himself, the Principal

wanted to keep a tight rein over what occurs at his school. We had virtually no contact with

any other staff or faculty member. Every question that we asked of the Principal was responded to clearly, yet there seemed to be a nervousness and an anxiety about him. He did not seem to be 100% comfortable with us being at this school.

"One final note: when we conducted our discussions, several students related to us that they did not know who the Principal was, having never seen him."

Diversity:

Gillian: *"The school is a multicultural organization with the purpose being not only to educate its students but also to transcend the differences among different cultures. It is an integrated school. The school seems to be very successful in socialization and developing interrelationships between groups. The Latinos in the school are fairly diverse, predominantly Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, with very few Mexicans."*

Yet, Cynthia notes a tendency to "stay with your own kind" with regard to multicultural relations.

Cynthia: *"In terms of student relations, I was bearing in mind during my tour the information I'd heard from students regarding the 'locker bays.' I noticed that within the different locker bays spread throughout the school, you could see homogenous groupings by nationality. This gave me the distinct impression that students did choose to socialize with their own nationality."*

In summary, in this school, the students were impressed with

the largeness of the physical plant, the resources available, the many options available to students, an unclear relationship to the surrounding community, a certain coldness, but a certain freedom as demonstrated in the relative lack of security measures.

The students also felt that the Principal seemed to want to over-control the visit. The Principal was the sole host during the visit, but indicated that the Assistant Principals were off performing other duties resulting in the school being temporarily short-staffed. To the degree that these impressions are fair, they may indicate that the relatively new principal is concerned with maintaining control in a school that has traditionally permitted students quite a bit of freedom.

It is of interest that, with regard to both schools, the Fordham students were impressed with how "multicultural" the schools were. But there was an important difference noted -- the multiculturalism in the first school was viewed as being more celebrated by the administration or more flowing among the students than in the second school. What is of significance about these impressions is that it appears that, for Latino students, multiculturalism can flower alongside success (defined in this study, as low dropout rates for Latinos).

The behavior of the respective principals also made a distinct impression on the students. Although this study did not address the role of the upper echelon, it is of interest that this variable was of considerable importance in all of the impressions generated. In future research on Latino populations, it may be worthwhile to

focus specifically on the role of the principal in establishing positive multicultural learning environments. As Torres Stern (1991) has indicated the role of the upper echelon in supporting bilingual education programs is an important variable. Important questions to address in the future research on Latinos are:

      a.   To what extent does the upper echelon of the school support and legitimate cultural difference?

      b.   To what extent does the upper echelon of the school support and legitimate bilingual education?

      c.   What evidence is there of this support -- posters; special celebrations of different cultures?

The physical facilities and setting of the two schools impressed the students. However, it is difficult to discern the significance of this.

School C

Laura: *"From the moment we entered the school we faced disrespect by the security guard at the door. Not only were we disrespected, but a high school student that came in late also experienced this disrespect. This began to shape my negative image of the school. In the Principal's office we were greeted in an unfriendly manner; the first thing they asked us was what we wanted. The Principal rudely got up to answer a phone call while we were introducing ourselves, and then did not want to hear the introductions he had missed. We obviously were not wanted there. I also feel that we intimidated the Principal since we were all Latinos*

demanding to know how our people were doing in his school.

"During his speech he blamed Latino dropout on their migratory experience -- a factor that was not considered as a cause for educational failure at the schools that had low Latino dropout rates -- so his argument is invalid. He also blamed the limited success of the school on the fact that it was a zone school and could not choose the best students but had to accept everyone. He also stressed that many students were too old, and by a certain age had to leave without graduating. I don't know what this man thinks should be done with the students that are not accepted to specialized high schools or that are too old for their grade. By using such arguments, he is saying that such students are a bother and have no chance of success.

"The Principal continued to place blame on the location of the school and on the economic situation in which the students live. These arguments are also not valid. Based on the research we conducted prior to the visits, we found that successful schools exist in low and upper-middle-class neighborhoods; the same applies to unsuccessful schools. Research also indicates that students are able to succeed regardless of their low family incomes. One of the schools we visited had a 50% poverty rate, and then there is the example of the very successful Chula Vista school in California. I also cannot believe the Principal tried to buy us with his "one student success"[2] letter, and then tried to say that the school has failed statistically, but [that] their efforts have not. Throughout his whole speech I kept realizing that a big reason why this school is not successful is because this man is insensitive to Latinos and did not care about them, even though they are over 40% of the student population. It was obvious that he focused

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[2] This refers to a letter that was read by the Principal. The letter was written by a relative of a non-Latino student who had dropped out of School C. The letter essentially thanked the school for all their efforts to prevent the drop out.

on the non-Latino student population in his school because they would bring "success" to his school. Such a man should not be the principal of a predominantly Latino school."

Another student had a very similar reaction and repeated the example of the "one student success" letter cited by the Principal.

Mario: "The school is in an old, battered and nondescript building... It did not appear to me that the Principal knew why we were at his school, for he actually inquired about our intent. After our intentions were explained, the Principal described his school in detail. The Principal touched on the 'problems of urban education,' citing poverty outside pressures and dysfunctional families as major factors. He further added that his school faces a lack of resources and has no control over a student that 'falls through the cracks.' This statement was solidified by his reading of a letter which told the story of a student who, despite the constant assistance and help provided by the school, still dropped out.

"The Principal and his staff were very defensive about their school and were hesitant to take responsibility for anything negative pertaining to their school. They were also not well-prepared for our arrival and did not facilitate our intentions and goals."

The following impression of School C is from a student who says "Although I knew the school had a high dropout rate, I tried to go in with an open mind and tried to see the school with no bias whatsoever." However, she concludes: "This school did not give me a good impression either from its outside appearance or from what I saw on the inside." She says:

Marisol: *"As I arrived in the morning, it was very quiet outside of the school and you saw no one. This was intimidating to me because the area did not seem too safe. [The Principal joked that the school was referred by the community as a fortress. There are two implications to this, one is that it is a safe haven; the other is that it is removed from the neighborhood it serves.] Once I entered the school, I noted that there were many Asian-American and Pacific Islander students. For the most part, the rest of the students were mostly from a Hispanic or Spanish-speaking background and the other students that remained were mainly Black or African American. For the most part, I noticed that the students from the various cultural backgrounds stayed together in small groups or cliques. I did not see too much interaction between students from various backgrounds.*

"I saw a lot of negativity in the environment and I noticed this from students as well as from the teachers and the Principal. I saw hardly any interaction between students of different backgrounds, but I did see awareness and interaction within certain groups.

"I learned [from the principal] that the majority of bilingual and LEP students are from a Dominican background. Twenty percent of the Latino population are LEP students and the other 80% are non LEP. The majority of the students in Special Education are Puerto Rican."

Carlos: *"The school is undoubtedly overcrowded and understaffed. There are simply too many students and not enough teachers. There was no feeling of warmth, but rather pity. It became evident that no one wanted to be there. They seemed to be there for one of two reasons, to either stay with their friends or attend one or two classes so as to say that an effort had been made on their part. The school is equipped with up-to-date computers and software*

packages. The _ly problem is that not one Latino student was seen using these facilities. The classrooms are not large enough, and the teachers appear to have difficulty in keeping order within the class. [The classrooms in this school have doors with locks that close when the door is closed. I realized this when I tried to re-enter a classroom I had left momentarily. When I inquired why this was the case, I was told that students had taken to yelling into the classrooms, while classes where in session. Therefore, locks were placed on all doors so as not to disturb the classes.] Glancing into several rooms, I noticed that there was little work being done. The classroom discussions were one-sided, there was little interaction between students and teachers."

Another student said: "After having met with the Principal and speaking to the students, I am not at all surprised that this school had a bad reputation. My impressions of the school are not very good. After our visit, I left very angry, and saddened by the situation at the school.

"The one thing that upset me the most was the Principal. His racist views were so blatantly obvious there was no wonder in my mind why Latinos are doing so poorly at this school...Knowing that his school is not doing its all to help Latinos, he should find ways to implement a successful change: a change that would better the school and help the Latino community within the school. Instead, he believes that leveling the neighborhood and rebuilding it in order to bring in new families with children who will attend the school is the way to make the school better. If that wasn't bad enough, he went on to say that, if he could, he would love to hand pick which students could attend the school in order to bring up its academic standing. Obviously, this man believes that the students that do attend the school are not up to par....

"This school is a zoned high school and the neighborhood in which it is situated is and

always has been an immigrant neighborhood. Leveling the neighborhood would not help the dropout crisis, just move it somewhere else.

"I believe that the Principal does not view the school as a whole, instead he deals and caters to the one particular population, forgetting about the Latinos...

"It is sad to know that the Principal's views trickle down and affect the students. The Latino and Black students at this school are aware that they are treated unfairly and unequally. Teenagers are very impressionable, and if they are treated as though they cannot succeed or as if their greatest accomplishment would be just to finish high school, then they will act accordingly. With no incentive to do well in school and continue their education, it is no wonder that these student's aren't doing well. They are falling through the cracks, cracks that were made by bureaucratic deficiencies and school administrator's and staff that just do not care."

What is perhaps of greatest comparative interest here is that the impression students had at this school was not one of multiculturalism or a positive diversity (as in the first two schools), but of various separate groups of students, who had little relationship to one another. Also striking, is the extremely negative perception students had of the Principal -- his attitude toward his students and toward the Latino group of researchers. As one Fordham student put it: "He is cutting the rope for academic success because of his own stereotypes." If one could summarize the Principal's view, it seemed to assume that the school was functioning as it should and that those that were not

"cutting the mustard" (i.e., graduating from the school) had problems the school could not resolve, e.g, dysfunctional families, poverty, drugs, etc.

This attitude was quite in contrast to that expressed by the principals at the schools with low Latino drop out rates. One principal, for example, explained their success with Latino students by saying: (1) they recognize the population they serve and they address the problems this population presents. Examples of this include the development of letters in English and in Spanish to parents; the development of bilingual programs for students who are not very literate in their first language. Thus, they act in contrast to other schools that may recognize they have a changing population, but do nothing about it. (2) They work to meet the standards set instead of abandoning them or forgetting about those who have difficulty meeting them. (3) They also work hard to recruit bilingual teachers and they seek teachers who have an interest in working with kids. Various examples were given of how they have operationalized this process. Interestingly, although their teaching staff is only about 10% Hispanic, 20% of the staff speaks Spanish. (4) They push their kids to excel, entering them in every conceivable contest. (5) They consider the bilingual kids, not as belonging to a separate group or department, but as belonging to all the teachers. This school has even developed an exchange program with a Spanish-speaking country.

The principal at the other school with a low Latino dropout rate was less specific about policies toward Latinos kids, but it

was clear that his orientation (and that of the school) was that
everyone should have an opportunity to do what they want; that the
school should develop all students and the total child. Thus, and
in contrast to the School C, special programs were not developed
for "worthy" or select students but for all students. The
diversity of students did not appear to alter the belief that all
students should receive a good education. It may be that Latinos
do better in school structures that meet specific needs and/or that
are truly open to all students.

Another more subtle theme that seems to surface here is that
Latinos may be having a very different experience at School C as
compared with other students. This is implicit in Carlos'
observation of who is using the computer equipment and in Liz's
comment about the Principal favoring another group. The
differential in dropout rates between Latinos and non-Latinos at
this school is greater than at any of the other schools. This
school also has the highest Latino dropout rate of all the schools
we visited.

In some ways, this issue is related to the neighborhood issue
raised above. The student notes that the school has always served
an immigrant neighborhood. The question, of course, is why if it
has always served immigrant populations, it is not currently doing
this for Latinos. The school has developed programs for non-Latino
immigrant populations who come from outside the borough. Indeed,
the Principal noted that 900 students out of over 3000 come from
outside of the area for city-wide programs they have developed.

Another issue that seems to surface here for the first time is that in this school, as contrasted with the first two, discipline and order are problems.

The impression of this school that is perhaps most haunting comes from one of the Fordham students. In truly youthful fashion, she expresses her optimism at the potential ability of students to learn and of people to effect learning. She also expresses her frustration at the lack of clear or concrete options on how to accomplish this. Liz says:

"I wish there was something that we could do to help these students. It is frightening to know that the students of today have no incentive or guidance to succeed in school and better themselves. If only all those that do not care about these students would realize that each one has potential to be a leader of tomorrow, perhaps they would change and help these students bring out the best in themselves."

<u>School D</u>

The last school we visited did not elicit strong first impressions. This may have been affected by the fact that the day we arrived there had been a large snowstorm. This affected the general ambience inside the school as well as outside of the school. It also affected our time of arrival. But, generally speaking, the school on other days is not outstanding in any particular regard. It is a large zoned school, not particularly decrepit in terms of its facilities, in an area that is stable, working to middle-class, and with a very low crime rate. The area

is perceived as predominantly white, but the school population is quite diverse, being about 38% Hispanic, 32% white, 22% Black and 10% Asian. The dropout rate of Latinos is over 28% and that of white students is 15%. The poverty index is about 35%, similar to one of the schools with low Latino dropout rates.

Lisa: "As soon as we entered the school, we approached the security desk and asked for the Principal's office. We then had to fill out a visitor's registration form and show identification. We were then directed to his office. There he awaited and he proceeded to talk about the agenda for the day. Several other staff joined us and would be with us throughout the day. [A Latino student from the school was also asked to join us.] The Principal informed us that our research and discussion would be taking place inside the classrooms. When we arrived at our first classroom, it was a total disaster. The students had been informed that we were coming in advance, but that seemed to make no difference. The first group of students was uncooperative, loud and noisy."

Carlos: "At this school, the area appears to be the only bright spot. The streets are not filled with drugs, but instead with well-mannered individuals. Again, the students are greeted by the unfriendly security personnel. I observed that they were not told to go to class; instead they were chased in. I had a hard time finding the bathrooms and once I found one, it was locked.

The halls are both narrow and occupied by students who have no intention of going to their classes. [This may have been affected by the snowstorm that day, had an impact on

student and faculty attendance and general discipline.] The classrooms we. dominated with*

conversation, however, it was usually the black or white students speaking, while the Latino

student was trying to find a way in which to fit in. The building is well-maintained, but there

are those areas which could use an adjustment such as the bathrooms, cafeteria and gym."

Thus, the initial impressions of this school indicated tight security and some problems with control and order. But it is difficult to generalize, due to the unusual circumstances of the day, i.e., the large snowfall. Furthermore, we did note that the school was particularly concerned with racial tensions.

STUDENT VOICES

Spirit

Many authors have noted that a beneficial school environment is a crucial element to positive educational performance (Lucas, et. al., 1990). Carter and Chatfield (1986:213) state that high student outcomes can be attributable to "an aggregate of shared positive perceptions, values, and beliefs combined with appropriate actions." All this causes "high levels of achievement." In view of these findings, we decided to include a question that asked students what they thought of their school's spirit. Specifically, we asked: "How would you describe the school "spirit"?

The general pattern that we found was surprising at first but, as we examined the data more carefully, it was consistent with our hypothesis, i.e., that schools with low Latino dropout rates would

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differ in this regard from those with high rates. As expected, students at School A felt the school spirit was good, but those at schools B, C, and D did not feel the school's spirit was good. The question then surfaces: why didn't students at School B, a school with low Latino dropout rates, perceive a "good" school spirit?

It appears that much has to do with the absence of a sports program and the new principal's role. Some typical examples of student comments were: "no enthusiasm," "no sports excitement or activity," "too many free periods and not much to do in them." Overall the students felt that coming to school was "no big deal," "just another day," and "dull." Even though this school has places for students to go to during their free period, the Latino students said "no one goes." Our own observation of these places showed other students there, but few visible Latinos. This question also stirred the student's attitude toward the principal. They said the old principal was better and many said they did not even know who the principal is or "never even seen the principal."

Yet, Latinos continue to stay in this school. Thus, school spirit is not by itself sufficient to explain why Latinos stay in school or drop out. The students may continue to come because they like the students there. Indeed, some of those we interviewed felt the students were warm, but that the teachers and other staff were not involved enough. Students also continue to come to this particular school because it has other characteristics in place that appear to make the school conducive to learning for Latino students. These include extensive resources; a great deal of

choice over course selection; a sense of order; and an apparent feeling of comfort that students have in School B.

   Another surprising and significant finding was that LEP students at Schools C and D described their school spirit as good, while non-LEP Latino students did not. This tendency was found to a limited degree at Schools A and B, but it was more pronounced at schools C and D. Typical answers of LEP students at School C were that the school spirit was "happy," "fun," that there was "unity among the Spanish-speakers," and, "a lot of school spirit within the Latino groups." These comments were echoed in more moderate form at School D: "The school spirit was fine," "the atmosphere is very calm," "one of the best," "teachers are friendly and fair" and "the environment is quiet compared to other areas."

   In contrast, the non-LEP Latinos at both schools saw school spirit in very negative terms. For example, at School C the English speakers said that: there was "no school spirit," "the school is boring," "school spirit is dead," "most people are not involved," and they "only wanted to get out." At School D, the responses of non-LEP students were similar: "no spirit," "it sucks," "dull," "we have to do for ourselves," "everyone sticks to their own business, "people are not enthusiastic," and, "they have a great field, but no field games."

   The following assessment of one of the Fordham students as to why non-LEP Latino students view their school in the way that they do is of interest and merits further investigation. *To them, the best part of school is that it gives them a chance to get together with their friends. They are*

enthusiastic about participating in those classes in which a sporting event or game is involved; however, they seemed a bit bored when it came to any educational programs. This is not a result of a lack interest, it is because they are taught that they will not succeed. They receive no encouragement from faculty members or administration. They do not enjoy the classes because they are not encouraged to participate. They are not applauded for trying; instead, they are ridiculed. They enjoy lunch and gym the most. This is because it gives them a chance to talk to one another and exchange different ideas and stories (which they don't do in class)."

There are a number of possible reasons for why LEP students at schools with high Latino dropout rates may perceive a more positive school spirit. These results may reflect a tendency of LEP students to be less critical.[3] It may also be that LEP students have a different, more positive, experience than non-LEP students have in the same schools. The Bilingual Program may provide a home within the school that functions more effectively than the rest of the school. It may also be that because of their limited English proficiency and common first language, Latino LEP-students tend to unite and to seek each other out more for mutual assistance. Consequently, they would experience school more positively. It may be that other variables associated with bilingual program structures may influence the experience, e.g., teacher:student ratios, less marginality because of the presence of bilingual role models, etc.

Whatever the reasons are for this split between LEP and non

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[3] This tendency was also noted by Dr. Maria Torres at one of the Latino Commission meetings.

LEP students, the finding is intriguing and suggests the need for further research. An important question to investigate is whether non-LEP Latino students are at higher risk than LEP-students. This possibility runs counter to popular opinion, but at both School C and D this was the impression of some of the staff, i.e., that non-LEP Latino students had higher dropout rates than LEP Latino students. This differential between LEP and non-LEP was particularly evident at School C where so many non LEP Latinos were to be found in their special education programs. It may be that in the structure of bilingual programs, LEP-students have found or developed a haven that provides a positive learning environment, with positive role models who motivate students to complete school. Non-LEP students, on the other hand, have nothing equivalent to this and may consequently fall through the cracks.

The last finding with regard to school spirit suggests a refinement of the general pattern. This was noted most in School A, where most students found the school to have "good" school spirit, but this tendency was seen (to different degrees) in all schools. The perceived "spirit" is different for the students who are involved in activities as compared with those not involved. The more involved students were, the better they felt the school spirit was. This was also seen at School D, where non-LEP-students do not get involved with school activities and consequently also perceive school spirit to be quite poor or non-existent. This finding raises the issue of access. The research question to be addressed here is: to what extent are Latino students encouraged

or prevented from involvement in school activities at various schools?

In summary, the general pattern we found was (1) that school spirit was perceived as "good" at School A and not good at the other schools. However, there were some further wrinkles in this general pattern. We also found (2) student involvement affects perception of school "spirit;" (3) that LEP students at schools with high Latino dropout rates perceived a more positive school spirit than non-LEP students, suggesting different high school experiences for both LEP and non LEP students.

Important questions for further research are: (1) Is the experience of LEP students different from that of non LEP students? Why? What is the role of the bilingual program structure here? (2) Are non LEP students at "higher risk" than LEP students? (3) Will models that provide external motivational agents for non LEP Latino students alter their academic success? (4) What other variables in addition to "school spirit" are important in creating positive learning environments for Latinos? (5) to what extent are Latino students encouraged or prevented from becoming involved in school activities at various schools?

Cultural Sensitivity

According to some authors, two crucial elements of Latino high educational achievement are the demonstration by educators and school staffs of "cultural sensitivity" and the negation of "cultural deprivation" arguments. (Carter and Chatfield, 1986:205;

Lucas, 1990:322-327).   These are related in that if educators
understand and respect other cultures, they will be more sensitive
to cultural differences and less prone to blame cultural
differences for poor performance.   If they are culturally
knowledgeable, they will also come to understand that all cultures
are very broad, heterogenous and active phenomena that include
diverse individuals.   These conceptions will make it difficult to
fix the blame for educational failure on stereotypical conceptions
of culture.   This and its relationship to positive outcomes has
been noted in the literature.

For example, Carter and Chatfield (1986:217) writing on
bilingual schools, points out that teachers and administrators in
effective bilingual schools did not blame students' culture and
environment for failure in school.   Rather, he noted that in
effective bilingual schools: "...if kids do not learn it is the
schools' fault...The locus of control of academic achievement and
attainment is considered to be within the school; staff clearly
recognize that they can solve the problem and do not blame
conditions over which they have no control."   In effect, the staff
did not resort to placing the locus of blame on the individual
students if they did not attain high educational achievement;
rather they viewed the institutions as the source of the problem.
Torres (1991:18) also noted that "cultural misunderstandings or
prejudice on the part of teachers" may cause students to feel
culturally disempowered and establish animosity toward the school,
and its staff, resulting in low academic achievement.

In view of the increasingly multicultural nature of the
country and city, it is important to encourage understanding and
respect for the students' cultures. Indeed, this was cited as an
objective of bilingual/E.S.L programs in the New York State Regents
Policy Paper and Proposed Action Plan. (Torres, 1991) In view of
these findings and policy shifts, we decided to get student
perspectives on whether they thought their teachers and counselors
were culturally sensitive. The specific questions we included
were: (1) Do you think the teachers are sensitive to Latino
cultural differences? (Why or why not?) and (2) Do you think the
counselors are sensitive to Latino cultural differences? (Why or
why not?) The responses we received revealed important differences
between schools.

School A

The picture that emerges at School A is one where teachers and
counselors are perceived as either sensitive or neutral with regard
to Latino cultural differences. Neutrality with regard to cultural
differences is augmented by a sincere interest in the academic
abilities of Latino students. As one student said: "teachers and
counselors were not necessarily sensitive but related to their
academic abilities." This perception is important because it
implies that students felt they were all treated equally, i.e.,
based on their abilities and not their culture. In essence, they
did not perceive any favoritism for "elite" or "sovereign" cultures
or groups. There was a tendency at this school to see the

counselors as more sensitive than the teachers, but even here what seemed to be the key issue was that the counselors looked at the ability of the student, not his or her ethnicity. LEP students felt that teachers were very culturally sensitive, respecting their ways and speaking Spanish. This is not surprising given that most LEP students were in bilingual programs.

School B

At School B a slightly different picture emerges. As in School A, LEP students found teachers to be very sensitive; this was especially true of the Spanish teachers, who were found to be "the most sensitive and taught exactly what they had to teach." LEP students felt there were some preferences expressed in the school, but it was a multicultural school "with teachers who are great and respectful."

The non LEP students tended to be split, but it was "not a big issue" because students felt everyone was treated the same. Thus, some teachers were seen as "more involved with Spanish students than others;" but, in general, "students didn't find their culture was put down." In essence, students said "it depends on the teacher" but teachers were not overly sensitive. There was some reference to the administration, which was not viewed as particularly sensitive. The students felt that the administration saw issues as either "black" or "white" and that Latino issues were neglected. An example that was given was that Latino culture is celebrated for only one week during the academic school year. "They added that the celebration is an injustice in comparison to

the month long celebration that Afro-Americans have every
February."

<u>School C</u>

In School C, the general consensus of the Fordham interviewers
was that most of the students felt that their teachers were not
sensitive and their counselors just did not care. This opinion was
widespread. As one of the Fordham students summarized it: "the
majority felt counselors and teachers did not care about Latino
cultural differences." Some students felt that some teachers and
counselors were "racists, or just were not sensitive to Latino
cultural differences." In summary, although <u>some</u> teachers and
counselors were seen as sensitive, <u>many more</u> were seen as
unconcerned with the students or their culture.

<u>School D</u>

At School D, opinions on teacher/counselor sensitivity was
mixed. Some felt teachers and counselors were sensitive and others
felt they were not. The question varied significantly from student
to student. According to some, teachers were insensitive and known
for openly articulating Latino stereotypes. While others argued
that it was not that teachers were insensitive, but that they
failed to respect Latino cultural differences and they failed to
obtain a better understanding of them. Favoritism was seen as an
issue and it was noted that certain counselors told students that
they should apply to a city or a "minority" college.

The response of LEP students was of interest in this school
because they thought that it was good that counselors were <u>not</u>

sensitive to Latino cultural differences. They understood the question to mean that if this sensitivity did exist then perhaps Colombians might be treated more favorably than Mexicans, for example. Despite the mixed responses on the general question of "cultural sensitivity" what is apparent at this school is that there are few (if any) positive examples cited of sensitivity to Latino culture.

Summary

At both School A and School B, cultural sensitivity is either present or neutral. Students feel that it is either quite good -- as in the case of LEP students -- or it is "not a big deal." Teachers and counselors are seen to vary in the degree to which they are culturally sensitive, but there is the sense that one's culture will not work against one and that students will be treated equally regardless of their culture. There is some interest in having greater positive recognition for Latino cultural differences, but this is not a major problem. This picture contrasts sharply with the pictures that emerge from Schools C and D where there is either general consensus that teachers and counselors are not culturally sensitive or there are few (if any) positive or productive examples cited of sensitivity to Latino culture.

Thus, when looking at factors contributing to Latino dropout, cultural sensitivity is clearly a plus, while cultural insensitivity and negativity are clearly obstacles to achievement. In the absence of cultural sensitivity, an acceptable surrogate

seemed to be neutrality toward cultural differences combined with good teaching.

National Origin: The kids know the deal

It is perhaps important to note that while many argue that cultural sensitivity can be greatly enhanced by teachers whose cultures resemble that of their students, this is not sufficient by itself nor is it a requirement for cultural sensitivity to be present. Lucas, et. al. (1990) note that in the effective high schools they analyzed (with many Latino students) many non Latino teachers were bilingual and bicultural. They had achieved this status through a variety of methods. Some teachers, for example, visited schools in Mexico in order to better understand how Mexican students were taught and therefore made some pedagogical transference and modifications in their own teaching of Mexican and Mexican American students. Others studied the Spanish language or Mexican culture.

We found this to be also true in our study. Being of the same cultural or linguistic background as the students was often a plus, but it was not necessarily sufficient proof that cultural sensitivity and support for the students existed. We saw this in the case of School A, where multiculturalism was celebrated and Latino students were doing well. Yet, the teaching staff was only about 10% Hispanic. However, 20% of the staff spoke Spanish. We saw its inverse manifestation in the comment of one of the Fordham students at School C. who said: "It was shocking to find out that one of the counselors, who happens to be Spanish, prefers to spend

time with the [non Latino] students." Finally, we saw it in the
general attitudes of all the students who spoke to us. It was
apparent, "they knew the deal." They knew when schools had
environments that were hostile to, or supportive of, them and they
knew who was antagonistic toward them or their group. They also
saw beyond the race and ethnicity of the individuals involved.
They knew.

Race and Ethnic Relations

Having examined how high school students view the cultural
sensitivities of the staff at the schools, we now turn to how high
school students perceive ethnic and race relations among students
at their particular schools. Since two questions were asked, i.e.,
(1) Do the different Latino groups get along with one another in
this school? and (2) Do the different racial groups get along with
one another in this school?, the responses are summarized
separately, i.e., by race and ethnicity.

Latino Groups in School:

Interestingly, there was little difference between the schools
with regard to how Latino groups got along. In general, student
descriptions reflected LIFE: It seemed that in every school
everyone got along and, at the same time, every school had
conflicts. Since Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are the two largest
subgroups, more conflicts were seen to occur between these two
groups. However, students added that when conflicts did occur
between these two groups "they generally were not fighting because

they were from different Latino groups but over other issues, e.g., sometimes they fought over girls." They also added that sometimes the subgroups have problems with the new groups, but this is not a major problem.

The following comments provide a summary of each of the schools: (at School A) "Sometimes there are problems, but they get along;" "There's always conflict but also a sense of unity;" and "no serious tension." (At School B): "any real problems between Latino groups were attributed to gossip and the groups tend to stereotype each other." (Interestingly, students at School B noted that the real ethnic conflicts were between Haitians and Blacks.) At School C there was a slight difference in that the Fordham students felt that Latinos "got along somewhat but there was no real unity among the Latinos." At School D: "everyone basically gets along" and "The Latinos share a bond with one another. They feel that they only have one another, so what they need to do is stick together and help one another."

At the same time that Latinos basically got along at all the schools, there was also mention made of specific tendencies. For example, there was a tendency for subgroups to "stay together." This was noted in most of the schools, but seemed most pronounced at School A, where there is a high percentage of Latinos from different countries. It was noted here that there is "some tension between the different Latino groups, they divide themselves by country of origin, i.e., Dominicans stay together, Colombians stay together." "The students felt that the different Latino

nationalities stuck with their own and seldom moved out of their
subgroup." And at School C: "A lot of the groups separate
themselves into smaller groups of the same country of origin."
There was also some tension noted at School C and School A between
Spanish speaking and non spanish speaking Latinos.

Racial Groups in School:

With regard to race, a somewhat different picture emerges in
each school. At School A, students say there is "race tension;" at
school B there is "no problem;" at School C there is "segregation"
and at School D there is "racism." We will examine each of the
schools separately to get a better sense of the racial climate in
each.

In School A, there is racial tension but it is not
overwhelming. Students at School A said that most of the time
racial groups did not get along with one another and that LEP
students faced discrimination by English speakers. It was also
noted at this school that Latinos and Asians get along, but that
Black Americans do not; that there is "sometimes always conflict."
The students said that "most racial fights are between Blacks and
Whites. Some racial slurs are expressed between Latinos and Blacks
and Whites. Latinos and Blacks were said to hang out together but
overall the majority of the fights that occurred were not really
racially motivated." Finally, it was concluded that "there was
tension between racial groups, mostly fights between blacks and
whites, but again there was no abundance of violence at the high

school. Thus, there is tension, but it is manageable.

In School B getting along racially was "not a problem." Students said there was "no racism in the school." Although sometimes there were fights and "considerable friction between Latinos and Blacks," everyone got along. As one student summed it up: "In general, all different kinds of people get along." Thus, at this school, groups get along and there was little violence in the school.

In School C, according to one Fordham student, the majority of students said that the different racial groups did not get along with one another and that the school was too segregated and racial groups were quite separate. Another Fordham student summarized the racial situation by saying that, although there was no violence between the different races, "one reason could be that they do not speak to one another...The different races form cliques not only in the classrooms but also the cafeteria, gym and at any other school related function. A third interviewer concluded that students felt racial groups got along for the most part, "although the students feel that the Chinese separate themselves from the rest of the student body." Students were seen as "always in separate groups".

The assessment of another interviewer was consistent with the others with regard to the extent to which groups were segregated within the school but differed with regard to the nature of the conflicts and the unanimity with which race relations were viewed. The interviewer said: "when it comes to the different racial groups getting along, some LEP students said that Blacks did not get along

with Latinos.   Other students said that there are some racial
problems, but for the most part Latinos and Blacks get along, and
the Asian groups separate themselves.   It seems as though various
ethnic/racial groups form cliques.   Fights do occur, but they are
rarely racially motivated."   Thus, the last interviewer saw LEP
students in conflict with Blacks, non LEP students getting along
with Blacks, and the Asians as quite separate from all groups.

     At School D, the message was quite clear that racism and
resentment existed alongside with some "getting along."   One
Fordham student concluded: "As for different racial groups getting
along, students stated that they do not because of some racism."
Another found: "there is a sort of resentment between Blacks and
Latinos.   This is because the Latino students believe that the
Blacks receive a better education [in this school].   The Latinos
share a bond with one another.   They feel that they only have one
another, so what they need to do is stick together and help one
another."   While another Fordham student found "Everyone basically
gets along; however, the students mentioned that Spanish and Black
students get along better than any two groups. The white students
are a bit more conceited and think they are better than all other
groups."   The underlying thread here is that, despite some "getting
along," students at this school perceive differential treatment by
the administration or by different groups of students according to
race.

Relationship to Success & Failure

     What is the significance of these findings to dropping out?

With regard to Latino groups "getting along," there seems to be
little relationship. All of the schools reported fairly benign
relations -- regardless of their dropout rates. With regard to
race, it appears that schools did differ. Where Latino dropout
rates were low, racism either did not exist or was manageable. At
schools where dropout rates were high, students reported either
segregated structures or racism. In both these latter cases,
students perceived a strong sense of a hierarchy in which Latinos
were not as recognized, or, as well treated as other groups. This
hierarchy was seen to be enforced, reinforced, or adhered to by the
school's staff, administration and/or other student groups. More
research is needed to better ascertain the relationship of such
racial climates to the success and failure of Latinos in schools.

Expectations and Opportunities

A central theme that surfaced from our literature review was
the relationship between educators' high expectations and students'
high academic achievement. Most relevant to Latinos in New York
City schools is Torres' (1991) research on bilingual schools. She
finds that "Teachers who demand a high level of academic
performance from students, as well as those who do not accept a
'cultural deprivation' analysis of school failure also have been
considered to promote greater learning and performance."(23)
Lucas, et. al. (1990:328) also notes that it is important to have
high expectations toward language minority students, adding that in
his study of effective bilingual schools, "...teachers challenged

students with difficult questions and problems. Complex ideas and materials were made more accessible to students..." That teacher and student expectations are important in Hispanic student achievement is a recurrent finding in the literature on Latinos (Rodriguez, 1991:129-131).

A.   Likes, Dislikes, and Ideal Schools

On the assumption that most high school students become explicitly aware of teachers' expectations only after-the-fact, i.e., after they have finished their schooling, we decided to approach this area more indirectly. Thus, we asked students the following questions: (a) What do you like MOST about going to school? (b) What do you like LEAST about going to school? and (c) What would you CHANGE about school to make it the ideal school? (supportive services, school programs, academic programs?) We thought these questions would elicit general attitudes of students toward their schools, as well as specifics about teachers' expectations. They did.

What Students Liked Most

At School A, students were generally positively disposed to the operations of the school. They said they liked the teachers, counselors, schoolmates, the discipline, and a special bilingual program. In fact, a few students said "they liked everything." Students also said they got support and encouragement from teachers and counselors. The safe environment of the school pleased a number of the students; they said they did not fear for their

physical safety around or inside of the school; a few also mentioned they liked the social relationships formed while attending.

At School B, students liked the freedom they had, especially during their free periods when they could go out to eat; their ability to choose their own classes and organize their course of study (they said this made them feel like adults in college); their school's campus; each other's company; the different departments, e.g., music and acting; and, they thought that the various academic clubs provided motivation. In general, they felt their academic classes were good "not great, not bad, just good." Interestingly, like School A, they said they "generally liked almost all the teachers, whether Hispanic or non-Hispanic, and they also enjoyed classes in some fields, e.g., music, art, and theater classes.

In contrast at School C, teachers were not mentioned. (Indeed, as we will see below, teachers and classes were among the things they least liked.) When asked what they liked most, students said, sports, swimming, volley ball, gym and dance and their friends. Peer group attraction, was the best part of school for many, it gave them a chance to get together with their friends. Indeed, it is distressing that some could think of nothing they liked about the school and responded that "they had no choice but to come."

School D was similar to School C in that students said that what they most enjoyed was the time they had to play sports or socialize. They said they liked lunch, gym, sports, basketball and weightlifting most. (Lunch gave them "a chance to talk to one

another and exchange different ideas and stories.")   Curiously,
only the LEP students mentioned that what they liked most was their
teachers; they said they inspired their students, taught their
lessons well and had a great deal of "respect." Some students said
the school was safer and better than other schools because it was
located in a nice neighborhood.   They also noted it had a nicer
interior than other schools.   Lastly, some students liked some
workshops they had had, e.g., on AIDs, computers, and music.
Students said classes were "ok" -- this was an indifferent ok.

What Students Liked Least: School A

    The responses of students to what they least liked and how
they would change the school to make it an ideal school are also
revealing.   In School A, what students liked least was that
teachers assigned too much work; that security measures were taken
to an extreme; and that the classes were overcrowded, especially
the AP (Advanced Placement) classes.   Although the students
understood that the strict measures employed by the security guards
ensured them of a safer learning environment, many still felt that
some of the measures were extreme.   With regard to the heavy
workload demanded by teachers, one of the Fordham students noted
with a certain perspicacity: "I found this to be interesting in
light of the fact that a majority of the students liked their
teachers and felt that other students should not treat them
disrespectfully."

Prescription for An Ideal School: School A

    As in most of the schools, the students' prescription for an

ideal school flowed from what they liked least or most. Thus, in School A, the students would have smaller classe_, more AP classes, expand AP classes to all subject areas and have greater student involvement in school.

LEP students in School A noted that what they liked least at this school was the discrimination they faced from English speaking Latinos as well as from other racial groups. They also said the security guards treated them unfairly because they spoke Spanish. Thus, they would change the guards and do away with the abuse they received from other groups.

What Students Liked Least: School B

At School B, students disliked their sports program, the long school day, cafeteria food, regulations about locker areas, the transportation to the school, and the little "cliques" within the school. The security guards were seen as being too old. Students said "it is sad to see them try to break up a fight; they (the security guards) fear they may get hurt. Related to this, students said there was not much security and anyone could walk in or out of the building.

Prescription for An Ideal School: School B

At this school, there were a myriad of ideas on how to change the school so as to make it more ideal but LEP status was related to many of the ideas proffered. There was general agreement that having a good sports program would make the school more exciting and "not dull." They felt that security guards who were young and able to move quickly should be hired and some LEP students endorsed

the use of metal detectors. They felt they would change some of the counselors at the school; they felt some of the counselors were not very helpful and seldom seen. They would bring in counselors that "really wanted to work with the students." LEP students felt that Spanish counselors would be a plus. Both non LEP and LEP students suggested instituting classes that discussed Hispanic culture as ways of making the school ideal.

LEP students added other ideas. They said they would "make classes more fun" have more things to do during free periods and have a shorter day; students would also alter the required order in which credits for graduation have to be taken. Interestingly, some students felt the school should be more selective with regard to the students it admits. Some felt there should be a change of principal or that the principal should be more involved and that some teachers were "just too rude." More music programs and more acting classes, a dress code, shortening the school day and classes, and terminating "junk" classes. (The dress code would do away, it was felt, with invidious comparisons over clothing.) LEP students also felt that there were too many rules and students were always being surveyed; that there was nothing much for seniors to do; they also did not like the cafeteria food; the long school day; and, in contrast to School A, they felt classes and teachers were boring and that teachers picked on students for no particular reason. (This school does not have a bilingual program.)

What Students Liked Least: School C

At School C, what students liked least were: the teachers, the

security guards, the food, that there weren't enough counselors, and that classes are too long and boring. Some students also noted that they were not encouraged to apply for college and others that they were pushed out to GED programs when they were overage. Students specifically mentioned certain teachers and classes they did not like. Some also noted they disliked when they were sometimes scheduled to take classes they did not need, which delayed their graduation.

Prescription for An Ideal School: School C

They were very straightforward and very much in agreement with regard to how they would change the school to make it more ideal: they would change the school's appearance (i.e., repair the building), change some teachers, counselors, and add more security. A couple of students said they "would change everything."

What Students Liked Least: School D

At School D, there was also a strong dislike of teachers and classes. Several students mentioned that classes are boring and students cannot express themselves in classes. Fordham students said that students find the classes to be too long and not well taught. "The teachers take for granted that they do not know and understand everything that they are told to read. The teachers do very little to ensure that all students understand what is being taught." One Fordham student concluded that students did not like their classes because students were not "encouraged to participate. They are not applauded for trying, instead they are ridiculed."

Many LEP students also mentioned that the classes were boring;

that there was racism; and that there were fights inside and outside the school. The bathrooms were also seen to be dirty and destroyed with graffiti.

Security guards were also part of what was least liked about the school. Some students stated that the guards curse at the students and treat them with disrespect. They said the guards take advantage of their authority.

In short, at School D, there was general agreement on the least liked dimensions of the school; these were "long and boring" classes, teachers, and security guards. In addition, there were other areas mentioned, e.g., the food and not having enough counselors. The students also said that the school has an overall "bad attitude." One student pointed out that since he was 19 they have been encouraging him to take a GED course or to just leave. Other students mentioned that they were not encouraged to apply for college. Students believe that there are programs within the school but they are not promoted and used the way they should be. Finally, students said racial problems inside and outside the school makes it difficult for the students to become involved in extra curricular activities.

Prescription for An Ideal School: School D

Creating the ideal school was as forthrightly proposed in this school as in School C. Students would begin by hiring teachers who care and by making classes more fun. They would remove a large number of the faculty and replace them with teachers who are patient and interested in the needs of all the students, not only

a select few. They would provide the school with more bilingual teachers so that those students who speak very little English would be encouraged to participate in the language which they feel more comfortable using. These teachers would praise a student's efforts and applaud his success. Students also indicated a need for more and better school materials (books, etc.) Several students said they would add more school activities to keep students coming to school.

LEP students tended to agree with many of these recommendations, but added they would change the food, introduce metal detectors and have the principal evaluate (through personal observation) those who teach. They would also get rid of some black and white students who believe themselves superior.

B. Access To University Opportunities

While pedagogical methods are a means to academic excellence, disseminating college information is also a way of empowering students to pursue academic careers. If students see that there is a clear path to pursue after graduation, then they will be more likely to stay and complete their high school education. Consequently, if students are assisted in developing post-secondary plans, their chances of staying in school are enhanced. The Lucas, et. al. (1990) study illustrated how bilingual college counselors in effective schools assisted Latino students on: how to obtain and disseminate information on different colleges; how to apply for college, how to complete financial aid forms, and how to apply for college scholarships. Counselors also worked with parents to

inform them of college opportunities for their children and, as a result, obtained their parental support toward this cause. College representatives from different colleges visited the school and former graduates that were presently attending college were invited to share their experience with the presently attending high school students. Thus, the role of counselors and other school staff can be crucial.

So, we asked the students "What does the school do to tell you about different college opportunities?" We again saw significant differences between schools. In reading the following, it is important to bear in mind that the following responses may not necessarily reflect exactly what schools do, but rather they tell us what Latinos thought they did.

School A

At School A, students said "they were informed all the time." They noted that the college office was helpful, there were meetings held with parents and students, their teachers and counselors informed them, the official class informed them, magazines were distributed with college information, and a special bilingual program in the school conducted trips to universities. (There was also mention made of a college bulletin that was given to students but this may have been the same as the magazines that were noted.) Students also noted that the school sponsored a yearly college fair; that it had a college counselor; that the college advisor distributed college information and reached out to students by visiting their English classes. Students mentioned that Advanced

Placement courses are offered in many (9) subject areas, including Spanish language and literature. In short, many students said the school counselors were effective when it came to informing them about different college opportunities. Everything is just peaches here.

School B

At School B, a similar situation prevailed in that students were generally satisfied, but there were also some difficulties noted. In general at School B, students noted that the college did a lot to help students with regard to college opportunities. They mentioned the school sponsored a college fair in which ivy league and metropolitan colleges are represented. They also noted that the school has a program which informed them about college expectations, how to apply to college and complete financial aid information and which offered Advanced Placement courses. They also noted that the College Advising Office provided information through a newsletter. The students felt the school did a lot to inform them of college opportunities particularly in their junior and senior years; they mentioned that college night, posters, letters and pamphlets that were sent home also informed the students and their parents of different colleges.

However, students also noted a few problems they had. They stated that Latino students have to take the initiative to be informed on college opportunities and that there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the college advisor. A number of students

said that the college advisor was a racist and obnoxious; that he encouraged Latinos and blacks to apply to the nearby community college or other city colleges. The students also said that the college advisor had stereotypical views as to the potential of Latinos and Blacks. Despite these difficulties, the students said that the school did a lot to tell them about college opportunities. They just felt as if their choices were limited by the counselor. Since the college counselor was basically the major source they had for information they felt there should be more college counselors.

School C

The situation was quite different at School C. When it comes to informing students of college opportunities, many students feel that they are not being well informed. Students told us that the school does sponsor a college fair, that the college advisor tries to inform students about SAT prep classes, that there is a video tape informing students about colleges, and there is a college office, which employs one advisor. However, the consensus was that if Latino students did not take the initiative, they would never learn about college opportunities. Many students said that the counselors and advisors "only tell the successful students about college." They added that some smart students were placed into a college discovery program; but generally "you have to find out on your own."

Some students said that they were not encouraged to apply, but when they were, it was to city colleges. One girl confessed to having been told by her counselor not to spend her money applying

to Harvard.   Another student was told not to bother to apply to Columbia University even though her academic record and SAT scores were high enough to make her a serious candidate for admission. Students said the College Advisor openly discouraged students interested in ivy league schools saying "they only accept very good students" implying [according to the students] that Latino students are not "very good students" or that they are incapable of handling the intellectual and academic rigors of an Ivy league education. One Fordham student summed up School C in the following fashion: *"Those who are interested in college are told to apply to community colleges. Any other school would simply be a waste of their time and money...They are told by the counselors that the state would provide very little towards their education, so in order to remain out of debt they are told to apply to these community colleges."*

Thus, it appears that at this school, there is a structure in place to help students gain access to college, but it is not seen as reaching most students; indeed, it is viewed as privileged, i.e., for those who are seen as the "smartest." It is also viewed as discouraging many Latinos from applying to private sector or four year schools. It may be that at this school, which was described as having a segregated racial and ethnic climate, that there is differential access to information depending on your racial or ethnic group.   These student views also raise the question of: to what extent Latino students in this school (and other schools like this one) are being informed about the various programs that have been established in private and public four year

institutions for students who are economically and educationally disadvantaged, e.g. HEOP, SEEK, and other educational opportunity programs.

School D

There is a similar situation perceived at School D. Students indicate they are told about college opportunities through the distribution of papers in official class and counselors which visit the classrooms and provide college information. There are college advisors for students in the 11th and 12th grades. Students also noted that there is a college student who assists students in completing college applications and that the college advisors seemed to be willing to extend themselves as far as writing recommendation letters to help facilitate the college application process. However, there is also the strong sense that Latino students are not informed of college opportunities unless they ask. One Fordham student noted that, to a certain degree, this tendency to not push Latinos to go to college stemmed from expectation levels; he said: "The Latino students are not encouraged to pursue a college career. They are also told that they would succeed more in a community college. The school feels that they have not fully prepared their Latino students for the type of education offered at the university level. The counselors are afraid that the Latino students' failure in a non community college will have a tragic effect on them."

One other problem noted at this school was that counselors did not tell students what classes they have to take in order to

graduate. Students said this was due to the fact that they made up their own program. But it was unclear to some what credits and classes you needed to graduate. This sentiment was also confirmed in the quantitative analysis, where students at this school were significantly less clear, than those at the other schools, on what they had to do to graduate. This problem is a fairly easy one to resolve, but if it is left unresolved it can have serious consequences. It may discourage students and cause them to dropout or to be generally out of step with a college application process that is fairly structured and time-regulated.

More importantly, the existence of the problem reflects the fact that Latino students are not being adequately addressed in this school. If they are less clear than Latino students in other schools on basic information, such as what they have to do to graduate, then they are going to fall through the cracks. The high Latino dropout rate at this school indicates that this is exactly what happens to many.

Truancy and Cutting Class

What do schools do when they are faced with students who cut class and are truant? We asked students what was done. The responses were interesting but did not differ significantly from school to school. All the schools had a fairly standard method of handling truants. Letters or cards were sent home and calls were often made to parents. The major differences had to do with the perceptions of LEP and non LEP students, but even these were differences of degree not substance. To some degree, students

attributed differential intent to the schools.

At School A, for example, the students stated that the school does not want students (truants) to drop out and tried to help them. Students stated, by way of examples, that truants were placed in Special Education classes as a way of helping them catch up with what they missed or that they were placed in Co-Op programs to give them an incentive to stay in school. Those truants which the school could not help were transferred to another school.

At School B, the punishment for truancy was seen as "not that great." However, there were two opinions expressed at School B with regard to intent. English dominant Latino students said: "The students feel that the school has patience with truants and is quite hesitant to kick a student out." While some LEP students indicated that the school does not do much to try and make the truant students stay in school. In fact, they mentioned that students are told to drop out as if there is no chance for them at all. One student noted that "if you care they care, but if you don't care, they don't either." LEP students also said that parents were informed of their child's truancy if they did not attend for more than a month, and if students did not return then they were thrown out of school. The truant's counselor would call them to the office where they were given a probation sheet. The parents were notified in their native language. Also some students were discharged or placed in a GED program. Thus, LEP students at School B thought truancy was handled in a much more punitive way than non-LEP students.

At Schools C and D responses were quite mixed and it was less clear how students perceived the intent of the school was with regard to truancy.

Student's Figure it Out

Although the schools might diligently pursue truants, it was generally agreed by most students (at all schools) that the methods were generally ineffective. Students found ways to get around the methods, for example, they would open the mail box first and not let their parents know that the truant letters or cutting cards had ever arrived. Calls to the home were most often in English and students were asked to translate the calls, allowing the students quite a bit of creative license on how to interpret the calls. An amusing example of the ineffectiveness of the calls was one student's description of the pre-recorded message that her parents received. When the call was received, she observed her mother saying "Que? Que?" and finally hanging up on because not only couldn't she understand the English, but it was also apparent (to her mother) that the voice on the other line could not hear her.

Cutting Classes

Since cutting classes also often leads to truancy and consequently to dropping out, we also asked students: "Why do you think students cut class?" and "What does the school do when students cut class?" Again, there were few major differences between schools. The reasons for cutting where quite similar across schools. Students cut class for the same reasons that students have always cut class and played hooky. They wanted to hang out

with their friends (or their girl/boy friends), there was peer
pressure, they said the classes and teachers were boring; they
preferred to go out and play hand ball; and some students said that
students were lazy. "Hooky parties" were mentioned by students at
a number of schools.

There was some difference between schools with regard to the
attitude of students toward cutting. Cutting seemed to be more
prevalent at School B but this was because the program structure
(i.e., large number of free periods) made cutting easier. At
School C, the attitude of students was slightly different in that
many said that "the students nor the teachers really cared, so
cutting was inevitable." However, it was also at this school, that
we found LEP students disagreed with this assessment and said that
their (bilingual) teachers really cared. Schools A and D had mixed
responses, with some laxity noted at School D when it came to
"cutters."

In all of the schools, cutting class was handled in a fashion
similar to how truants were handled, i.e., cutting cards were sent
to the home and phone calls were made to parents. Students
reported that some teachers marked down cuts on report cards and
that if students were caught cutting, the security guards would
chase them and if caught, escort the student to the dean. At
Schools A and C, there was a person called the "Cutting Dean."
LEP students tended to agree that these were the procedures for
handling truants and "cutters" but they also added that some
students were sent to detention and others were discharged. In

general, LEP students at most of the schools tended to perceive the
schools as handling cutters and truants more strictly than did non
LEP students.

In summary, there were some minor differences between the
schools, but the major patterns noted with regard to truancy and
cutting classes were: (1) students at all schools tended to cut
class for very similar reasons and these reasons are the same
reasons students have traditionally cut classes (2) procedures for
handling cutters and truants tended to be standard across all the
schools (3) students felt the methods for handling cutters and
truants were not very effective and/or were circumvented by
students. (4) there were some minor differences between schools
with regard to attitude toward cutting and truants.

Parental Involvement

Increasingly, it is argued that parental expectations and
involvement are important in positive student outcomes. Torres
(1991:214) notes the importance of parental expectations regarding
the Latino child's performance and says "the emphasis placed on
academic success will influence the achievement of LEP students."
Cummins (1986) maintains that minority students are empowered when
their parents are actively involved in the schooling process. In
addition, it is argued that when teachers reach out to collaborate
with students' parents, a connection between home and school is
made, bridging the gap between the home and the institution.
Others argue that with greater parental involvement more of the
school's resources are available for the community's problems; as

Carter and Chatfield (1986:214) puts it: "...the community serves the school and the school serves the community." Given that many view greater integration between parents and schools as a sound (if not critical) approach, our question was to what extent did the schools make efforts to involve the parents and how did the school attempt to involve parents.

What we found was that students at all of the schools mentioned the same methods when indicating how their school attempted to involve their parents. The major means used were letters; calls were made by some schools; sometimes announcements were made in homerooms. Some letters were bilingual; they invited parents to come to the PTA meetings or informed them of school activities. All schools also tried to notify parents when their children were failing or misbehaving in school. Students at all schools also noted the difficulty their parents had in attending meetings because of their work commitments and sometimes because of the language barrier. What varied by school was students' assessment of the school's intent, i.e., the extent to which schools tried to involve their parents.

At School A, students felt that the school made an honest attempt to involve parents. They mentioned that there was a parent orientation for freshman and incoming sophomores. Some parents were also informed about meetings when they came to shows or when conferences are held. LEP students at this school also mentioned that their parents were informed of all activities. In summary, students at School A were quite satisfied with the school's attempt

to involve parents.

In contrast, at School B, students said that parents were not involved and that transportation was a deterrent. Students said that parents received occasional PTA letters and announcements were made in student's homerooms. "Most of the students agreed that the school should do more to get parents involved." Although it sent letters and made calls to student's homes, the calls and letters were in English, for the most part. Other students said that parents are only asked to become involved on parent/teacher night or when their children got into trouble. Students at School B also said that their parents found the PTA meetings irrelevant. They felt issues of major concern were not addressed. Only neighborhood issues were discussed, yet, the majority of the students commuted. The students said that only "some parents become involved." LEP students at this school said "that their parents understand the school system, but expect the students to do it for themselves."

At School C, there was also a general consensus that parents could have been more involved. However, there was more negativity at this school on this issue than at the other schools. Students also said that the school only involves parents on parent/teacher night. Some students were more irate over the issue; they said parent involvement is not encouraged. "They are only told to come in when their child is in serious danger. A failure in one or two courses is not considered failure, but rather expected for Latino students." There was a general concern expressed that more attention is given to the parents of those students that are doing

well. Even many LEP students felt that the school does not make a
good attempt to involve the parents. They said: "the school does
not attempt to involve parents but they are obligated to send
letters informing parents about certain school events; they do not
make a good enough attempt; they send out one letter every term
which is not sufficient. Letters should be more frequent."

Some students at this school also mentioned that some parents
care and others do not; they remarked that some parents are losers
themselves, so how can they possibly be involved?

At School D, there was a split. While LEP students felt that
the school did make an attempt, non LEP students were more sullen
about this issue. LEP students noted that there were reunions and
meetings, that letters and phone calls are made to the parents, and
that most of the parents attend the meetings. Non LEP students
agreed that there were letters sent home inviting parents to attend
various functions. But they said that many parents do not go
because their children tell them that the school pays little
attention to what happens to them. They are only being invited
because the school feels that they have to show at least a small
amount of interest.

Thus, on the issue of parental involvement we see (a) general
satisfaction at School A, (b) little parental involvement at School
B, with geographic distance, language, and the irrelevance of
issues discussed being seen as an important deterrents. There is
(c) strong dissatisfaction with the school's intent at School C and
(d) moderate dissatisfaction at School D. We also see that schools

use similar methods to involve parents and that in general parents have difficulty attending the meetings because they work. The whole question of whether parents would be more involved if greater efforts were made to have them come is best addressed by Dr. Peter J. Negroni, a Puerto Rican Superintendent at Springfield, Ma. He argues that this issue is similar to the situation of guests in your home; there is a correlation between being wanted and coming. Future research should investigate how to bridge this gap between parents and schools.

Why Drop Out?

Finally, we asked students the "the big one" -- why did they think that Latino students dropped out of their school? We were surprised that we did not elicit strong differences between the schools. Student responses were similar from school to school and very similar to what we had already encountered in the literature (noted above), i.e., background influences, academic ability and achievement, social integration, commitments to schooling and out of school activities. A sampling of the responses at each of the schools also illustrates that students do not shirk from laying the blame for dropping out on individual dysfunction in some cases. But they also acknowledge the pressures that individuals face from their economic situations, their families and peers, and personal circumstances.

At School A, varied reasons were given for why Latinos drop out of the school; no one answer stood above the rest. Reasons noted most often were pregnancy, peer pressure and family problems,

the necessity of getting a job, students lacked motivation and were lazy. LEP students were alike in that they gave many and similar responses, e.g., economic situations forced them to choose work over school, or they just preferred to work; some students were lazy, disillusioned, have no incentives, they feel inferior to other students, lack support from teachers and parents. A Fordham student reflected: *"I think that the answers given by the students were coming from either a personal context (someone they knew) or just a reasoned guess. The answers given covered a wide range."*

At School B, students again cited a myriad of reasons, with pregnancy and economic and peer pressures receiving major attention. As in School A, students also focused on the responsibility factor. They said that some Latinos were lazy and did not like to study; hence they dropped out. They felt that for some, the work is too hard, or that they lack motivation. Another reason was that the students may not know of the available counseling services. LEP students said that students take advantage of the freedom they have; students are easily bored so they cut class frequently; many are influenced by peers from within and outside the school; some were just plain lazy; some students felt that parents do not care or guide them well; some students are intimidated by peers and refuse to come back. Interestingly at this school, the students mentioned that a factor affecting dropout was that Latino culture was not emphasized at this school and cited that there was no mention of Latinos in History courses.

Again, at School C, several similar reasons were noted:

economic pressure, low motivation, want to move too fast, prefer to hang out, are not encouraged by parents and/or teachers, too much pressure or simply do not like schools, pregnancy and drugs. LEP students responded similarly: students are lazy, they have family problems, get married, some get pregnant, not encouraged at home and at school, some live in bad environments; some have to work; some get a negative influence from how Latinos are stereotyped in films and sometimes the influence of parents is not good. There are also some students who do not receive enough attention from school.

Thus, at School C, the reasons for dropping out were varied and similar to reasons noted at Schools A and B. However, at School C there was also present a sense that dropouts were not encouraged to stay. The following summary comments by Fordham students illustrates this: *They believe that Latino students dropout because they are not encouraged to attend. They are pushed aside by their teachers. Many of them are told that they would be better off trying to find some full time employment. They are told that there is not much that the school system can do for them.*" And again, "*The students felt that there was a lack of encouragement for Latino students, hence they dropped out. Hand-in-hand with this assessment was the statement made by many students suggesting that Latinos were guided to take GED programs rather than continue school.*" LEP students echoed these sentiments when they said: "some students are advised to leave in order to get out and get their GED."

At School D, the question also stirred a lot of answers, e.g., "parents are never there and never involved; students are using

and selling drugs; peer influence inside and outside." They are
lazy and want to hang out or attend "hookey parties." Being put
down by students was a major issue as well. Some felt that Latinos
drop out of school because their families are unable to survive on
their present income. LEP students said that some were lazy and
followed the wrong path, taking up bad examples, lack of parental
support; students like the school yet the parents don't encourage
them, and peer pressure. Interestingly, they felt that their own
cultures were supportive of staying in school, but that other
cultures in the U. S. were a negative influence, so that, in
essence, assimilation led to drop out.

Students also noted that some students have the "I know I
won't succeed" attitude because they feel school is too hard. They
do not see and are not shown any opportunities for success."
Speaking more generally about Latino dropout, students at this
school mentioned racism outside the school was also a big issue.
They also responded that students do not feel like they have
anything to look forward to. Parents do not care because they too
are losers, on drugs, or in jail. Some felt teachers put students
down and do not give them drive to continue. They suggested the
development of clubs to improve the dropout rate. Some felt that
teachers need to become more involved. Others indicated that peer
counseling would definitely help.

Thus, what we find is that (1) students at all schools gave
varied answers that reflected social, economic and personal factors
that accounted for Latino dropout. (2) There was a greater tendency

for students in Schools C and D to feel that the schools did not provide sufficient support or encouragement to students. The answers also reflect the fact that students see dropping out as wrong; they see it as representing failure, a problem. This is of interest because it tells us that these Latino students (who are still in school) do not <u>want</u> to drop out. This counters the assumptions of many who argue that Latinos are not really very interested in finishing school

Placing Value on Students

We concluded that dropping out is triggered or helped by all of the factors students mentioned but that what determines whether a school has a high or low dropout rate has to do with how well it works to counter these factors. And what determines this is how much the schools value the students they teach, how much support they provide their students. Do the schools teach to the best of their potential as educators or do the schools teach to the best of the potential they perceive their students to have?[4] If the latter, then obviously teaching and learning will be very much affected by what educators think of the potential of their students. If they value their students, they will think their students have very good potential and they will teach to their potential as educators. If they do not....

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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[4] Comments by Dr. Peter J. Negroni, Superintendent of Schools at Springfield, Mass., at National Council of La Raza, Roundtable on Poverty, April 13, 1992.

This general message came through loud and clear in the concluding statements of the Fordham students. The respect and value in which students were held was extremely important in separating the schools with low Latino dropout rates from those with high rates. All but two of the Fordham students visited at least one school with low Latino dropout rates (Schools A and B) and one with high Latino dropout rates (Schools C and D). In their concluding comments, they compared the schools:

Laura: "In general, the feeling I got of School A was a positive one. The LEP students I interviewed were benefiting from the teachers, counselors and from a special program with which they were involved. I felt the students did suffer from discrimination by other Latinos, racial groups and security guards. [But] I felt the students were being properly informed about college and their problems were being addressed to a certain extent."

Laura's summary statement on School C was quite different: "In general, the feeling I got from what the students said is fairly negative. The school has no spirit. Many students loathe their teachers and classes. They felt the teachers and counselors were not sensitive to their cultural differences. There was no real attempt to inform and involve the parents in school activities. There was no desire to inform Latinos about colleges. I basically got the sense that this school was not interested in helping Latinos achieve, it is not one of the school's priorities."

She continues: "At School A the students were full of energy and happy, they were aspiring for success. At School C I sensed hopelessness. Even though the students I interviewed

were the ones still struggling to graduate, I felt that many were on the verge of giving up, and

no one seemed to be supporting them. ..I am convinced that the students are not at fault, like

the principal would have us believe, but that very few in this school want Latinos to succeed."

Marisol says: *"The influence and inspiration that students have at School A*

seemed much more positive [than School C] because they had more support from their teachers

and counselors."

Even when a school was not particularly sensitive to Latino
cultural differences -- as was the case at School B, the critical
issue was whether the school's staff thought the student was worth
teaching. This was also noted by the students.

Cynthia says about School B: *"Latino cultural issues seem to be put aside for*

the broader issue of educating the "whole child"...Although the level of cultural awareness among

the teachers varies, the students felt comfortable in their classes, and did not feel their cultural

differences elicited an uncomfortable atmosphere...There also seemed to be at this school "less

recognition of 'sovereign groups' [i.e., groups that have preferred positions] and a greater

emphasis on developing the aggregate student population....When you foster an independent

atmosphere, this reflects a high expectation level on the part of the administration and faculty."

Lisa also says about School B: *"Students have a lot of freedom and are*

treated with greater respect...more like adults. They are not looked down upon from the

beginning....:They know what they have to do and they do it. It is also apparent that teachers care more about the students at this school."

In comparing School B with School D, Lisa finds that at School D: *"Students are not given as much freedom, which is generally how most schools are run. The students do not take pride in themselves and teachers do not give them any credit either. However, security is greater and much stricter. Stricter to the degree where security guards disrespect and intimidate students.*

"Both School B and School D had that 'I don't care' attitude. However, it seems as though the teachers cared and pushed you a little more at School B. While at School D, the students did not have enough support. A lot of the students appeared to have given up.

"Both schools indicated a lack of sensitivity and even racism from counselors who suggested that minority students go to city or 'minority' colleges and both schools answered similarly the questions on dropout out, cutting parents, access to college, sports, and the relationship between different racial groups. Thus, they seem to have similar problems, but different results.

"Neither school showed much school spirit but one school is doing their work and the other is not. Students in School B are just coming to school, doing their work and going home. Students in School D, come to school, cut, are discouraged and dropout out. ...A lot of what is going on is in the classroom."

Gillian contrasting the same schools says: *"At School B, students seem to enjoy going to school because they feel very independent and confident about themselves. School D seems to lack good academic influences. There is not enough emphasis*

placed on students and their futures. Students do not feel appreciated or confident so they lose the desire to learn."

Marisol summing up School C says: *"It was a very tense environment outside and inside of the school. Many students seemed dissatisfied with their educational experience at this school. I saw a lot of room for improvement. I believe that because of the negative atmosphere students had a much harder time learning and appreciating a good education."*

One Fordham student summed up the situation by making reference to a popular ad on television which says, "Show me a parent who cares and I'll show you a kid who can learn." This she said is also applicable to anyone who works with kids, whether it be teachers, principals or counselors. Her formula was: *Caring teachers + caring students = school success.*

The extent to which Latinos, or any student group, is valued is not unrelated to the value which the external society places on the group. If staff are sensitive in a positive way to ethnic difference, it says you're important. I am recognizing you for who you are and this means that I value you.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In brief, our study shows that the schools we selected do

differ along some important dimensions and in the expected direction. These dimensions are students' perception of: school spirit, teachers and counselors' cultural sensitivity to Latinos, students' likes and dislikes, how students would change their schools, how different student racial groups get along, how schools handle university opportunities, and the extent to which schools encourage parental involvement. We also found that the schools do not differ substantially with regard to why students think Latinos drop out; how they view the school's handling of truancy and cutting of classes; and how Latino student groups got along. The section which follows summarizes the major conclusions within each dimension analyzed and provides recommendations within this area.

Spirit

When asking students about the "spirit" in their schools, we found what we expected: at Schools A and B, school spirit was "good," while at Schools C and D it was "not good." Yet, we found some factors that afffect this general pattern within the school. We also found that (a) how involved students were in school activities affected their perception of school "spirit" and (b) that LEP students at schools with high Latino dropout rates perceived a more positive school spirit than non-LEP students. This seems to suggest that there are different high school experiences for both LEP and non-LEP students.

Recommendations on "Spirit"

We recommend further research into the following questions:

1a. Is the experience of LEP students different from that of

non-LEP students? Why?

1b.   What is the role of bilingual education programs here?

2.   Are non-LEP students are at higher risk than LEP
       students?

3.   Will programs that provide external motivation for
       non-LEP Latino students alter their academic success?

4.   What other variables in addition to "school spirit" are
       important in creating positive learning environments for
       Latinos?

5.   To what extent are Latino students encouraged or
       prevented from becoming involved in school activities
       (both academic and athletic) at various schools?

Race and Ethnic Relations

Interestingly, we found there was <u>little difference</u> between
the schools with regard to how Latino groups got along. In
general, student descriptions reflected LIFE: It seemed that in
every school everyone got along and, at the same time, every school
had conflicts. With regard to race, a somewhat different picture
emerged in each school. At School A students said there was "race
tension;" at school B there was "no problem;" at School C there was
"segregation" and at School D there was "racism."

We concluded that since all of the schools reported fairly
benign relations between different Latino groups -- regardless of
their dropout rates -- there was little relationship between this
variable and dropping out. With regard to race, it appears that
schools did differ. Where Latino dropout rates were low, students

seem to think racism either did not exist or was manageable. At schools where dropout rates were high, students reported either segregated structures or racism. In both these latter cases, students perceived a strong sense of a hierarchy in which Latinos were not as recognized, or, as well treated as other groups. This hierarchy was seen to be enforced, reinforced, or adhered to by the school's staff, administration and/or other student groups.

Recommendation on Race and Ethnic Relations

We recommend more research to better ascertain the relationship of racial climates to the success and failure of Latinos in schools.

Expectations and Opportunities

A.   Likes, Dislikes, and Ideal Schools

With regard to what students liked most and least at their schools, we found that at Schools A and B, students were generally positively disposed and they specifically mentioned that they liked their teachers and classes. In contrast, at School C teachers were not mentioned. (Indeed, as we will see below, teachers and classes were among the things they least liked.) School D was similar to School C in that students did not mention teachers and said that what they most enjoyed was the time they had to play sports or socialize.

The students' prescription for an ideal school flowed from what they liked least or most. Students at Schools C and D were very direct and clear on what they would change. At School C, they would change the school's appearance (i.e., repair the building),

change some teachers, counselors, and add more security. (A couple of students said they "would change everything.") At School D, students would begin by hiring teachers who care and by making classes more fun. They would remove a large number of the faculty and replace them with teachers who are patient and interested in the needs of all the students, not only a select few. Importantly, they would provide the school with more bilingual teachers. Students also indicated a need for more and better school materials (books, etc.) Finally, several students said they would add more school activities to keep students coming to school.

Recommendations Likes, Dislikes and Ideal Schools

We recommend that the specific recommendations made by students be addressed by the schools visited, but that they also be evaluated with an eye to seeing their applicability to other similar schools.

We recommend that students be surveyed at all schools as a way of evaluating student needs.

B. Access to University Opportunities

Only at School A were students totally satisfied with how the school informed them of different college opportunities. At School B, students were generally satisfied, but stated that Latino students have to take the initiative to be informed on college opportunities, and that they were dissatisfied with the college advisor. In contrast, at Schools C and D students felt that Latinos were not being well-informed and that they had to ask

before getting any help. At School D, students were also less
clear on what they had to do in order to graduate. We concluded
that at School C, if there is a structure in place to help students
gain access to college, it is not seen as reaching most students.
In School C, it is viewed as privileged, i.e., for those who are
seen as the "smartest." It is also viewed as discouraging many
Latinos from applying to private sector or four year schools.

Recommendations on University Access

We recommend that at Schools C and D, the question of whether
there is differential access to information, depending on the
student's racial or ethnic group, be investigated.

We also recommend investigation into whether Latino students
in schools are being adequately informed about the various programs
-- such as HEOP, SEEK, and other educational opportunity programs -
- that have been established in private and public four-year
institutions for students who are economically or educationally
disadvantaged.

We recommend that all the schools, but particularly schools
with high dropout rates develop liaison programs with universities
to facilitate college enrollment.

Truancy and Cutting Class

With regard to truancy and cutting class, there were some
minor differences between the schools with regard to how schools
handled these problems. Yet, in general, (1) students at all
schools tended to cut class for very similar reasons and these
reasons are the same reasons students have traditionally cut

classes; (2) procedures for handling cutters and truants tended to
be standard across all the schools; (3) students felt the methods
for handling cutters and truants were not very effective and/or
were circumvented by students; and, (4) there were some minor
differences between schools with regard to attitude toward cutting
and truants.

Recommendations on Truancy and Cutting Class

We recommend that the schools address the difficulties raised
by students in each school.

The schools did not differ greatly in terms of how they
handled truancy and cutting, yet there are significant differences
between the schools with regard to dropout rates. We recommend
further research into this area to ascertain why these dropout
differentials persist.

Parental Involvement

With regard to parental involvement, we found that students at
all of the schools mentioned the same methods when indicating how
their school attempted to involve their parents. All schools also
tried to notify parents when their children were failing or
misbehaving in school. All students noted the difficulty their
parents had in attending meetings because of their work
commitments, and sometimes because of the language barrier.

What varied by school was students' assessment of the school's
intent, i.e., the extent to which schools tried to involve their
parents. On this, the schools differed substantially. At School
A, the students felt that the school did its best to try to involve

parents.   At School B, students felt there was little parental involvement, with geographic distance, language, and the irrelevance of issues discussed at PTA meetings seen as important deterrents.   At School C, there was strong dissatisfaction with the school's intent while, at School D, there was moderate dissatisfaction.

We concluded that the whole question of whether parental involvement would increase if greater efforts were made to reach out to parents is similar to the situation of guests in your home: there is a correlation between being wanted and coming.

Recommendations on Parental Involvement

We recommend that future research investigate how to bridge this gap between parents and schools.

We recommend that schools survey parents in order to determine ways of bridging this gap.

We recommend that parents from the local community be aggressively recruited to work as school aids and in other positions at the high schools.

Why do Students Drop Out?

With regard to the question of why students thought that Latinos dropped out of their school, we found that (1) students at all schools gave varied answers that reflected social, economic and personal factors. (2) We also found that there was a greater tendency for students in Schools C and D to feel that the schools did not provide sufficient support or encouragement to students.

We concluded that dropping out is triggered or helped by all

of the factors students mentioned, but that what determines whether
a school has a high or low dropout rate has to do with how well it
works to counter these factors.

Student answers to the dropout question also indicated that
they see dropping out as wrong; they see it as representing
failure, a problem. This is of interest because it tells us that
these Latino students (who are still in school) do not want to drop
out. This counters the assumptions of many who argue that Latinos
are not really very interested in finishing school. We think that
this is a subtle but important finding that should be the premise
for any future change.

Recommendations on Dropping Out

We recommend that Schools C and D address the issues raised by
students, concerning the lack of support and encouragement they
perceive is given to students to stay and do well in these schools.

We also recommend that other schools with high Latino dropout
rates be evaluated in terms of how much support they provide to
Latino students to keep them in school, and, to help them do well
in school.

We recommend that the Board of Education adopt as a premise
for future policy that Latino students do not want to drop out.
Further, that they investigate ways to prevent Latino dropout from
occurring to the degree that it currently does.

Cultural Sensitivity

With regard to cultural sensitivity to Latinos, we found that
at Schools A and B, it is either present or neutral. At Schools C

and D, the general consensus is that teachers and counselors are not culturally sensitive, and there are few (if any) positive examples cited of sensitivity to Latino culture. We concluded that when looking at factors contributing to Latino dropout, cultural sensitivity is clearly a plus, while cultural insensitivity and negativity are clearly obstacles to achievement. In the absence of cultural sensitivity, an acceptable surrogate seemed to be neutrality toward cultural differences combined with good teaching. We also noted that being of the same cultural background is not sufficient by itself nor is it a requirement for cultural sensitivity to be present.

These findings are perhaps the most important in this study. One of the Fordham students, Liz, summarized the findings on sensitivity to Latino culture in a more personal way. Speaking of Schools A and B, she said: *"Latino cultural differences are treated in a sensitive manner. Latinos are not treated differently because of their ethnic/racial background.* [She added that students who were "at risk" would be helped by greater sensitivity to Latino cultural differences "because they often feel that no one understands them, or cares."] She continued: *"The students feel they are respected for the people they are. The sense of respect between teachers and students is obvious. Of course some felt that a few teachers were not very good and should be changed. This is understandable, when I was in High School I also felt that way about a few teachers and those always were the ones I was not learning anything from."*

Let us look more carefully at those schools with low Latino dropout rates. Students in School A perceived that teachers were

sensitive and positively predisposed to Latino cultural differences. Students in School B were not as united in their evaluation. LEP students found teachers to be very sensitive, especially Spanish teachers and they saw the school as "a multicultural school." The non LEP students tended to be split, but it was "not a big issue" because students felt everyone was treated the same, i.e., "students didn't find their culture was put down." In essence, students said "it depends on the teacher." Lastly, the students felt that the administration saw issues as either "black" or "white" and that Latino issues were neglected. Thus, in the two schools with low Latino dropout rates, there were some differences with regard to how students perceived the cultural sensitivity issue. But it was clear to students in both schools that the intent of the schools was to educate all students to the best of the staff's ability.

As noted in the section on "First Impressions," in School A this was accomplished through a number of means, e.g., by having strong bilingual programs; these programs were not isolated from the rest of the school and students were integrated into the curriculum of the whole school. As the principal put it, the students are not "the bilingual kids," they are "our kids." There was also a great deal of attention given to trying to recruit good, bilingual staff and even though only a small percentage of the instructional staff was Hispanic, a larger percentage were proficient in Spanish.

It was clear that the policy of School A was to have all

students meet the academic standards set by the Board, and to have
all students aspire to higher levels; this the school tried to
stimulate by encouraging students to enter various competitions.
There was also committed, involved and effective leadership at the
top and a concerted attempt to hire teachers who enjoyed teaching.
They were self-conscious about the fact they were an immigrant
school and worked to have their students perform their best. The
Principal felt that their approach differed from other schools that
recognized that their population had changed in that they tried to
deal positively with this change. They saw parental involvement as
a positive and the school was orderly.

In School B, there was less attention to multicultural issues
and sensitivity to Latino cultural differences, but the school was
still intent on educating, to the best of its staff's ability, the
students who were still coming to the school. It also had a good
curriculum with a lot of freedom of choice for students. In
essence, it tried to teach all students and it tried to teach
students many different subjects. It offered a variety of courses
and tried to keep students interested in school. Students liked
the honors courses; they wanted more; these were indications that
students were motivated to learn in this school. There was, again,
order and safety.

In the schools that had high Latino dropout rates, the
situation was in direct contrast. The pictures that emerge from
Schools C and D is either general consensus that teachers and
counselors are not culturally sensitive or there are few (if any)

positive examples cited of sensitivity to Latino culture. In these schools, Latinos were either segregated in a bilingual program or hidden from concern. Latinos, as a group, were generally invisible as a separate constituency. As the Fordham students noted in their concluding comments, the central idea that comes through loud and clear after all the talking with students is that the respect and value in which students were held was extremely important in separating the schools with low Latino dropout rates from those with high rates.

Recommendations on Cultural Sensitivity

In view of the fact that we found cultural sensitivity is a plus, and, cultural insensitivity is a detriment to Latinos learning and staying in school, we recommend that the Board of Education implement a curriculum of inclusion that would not only be taught in the schools but that would also require teachers, counselors and administrators to learn about Latino cultures. This curriculum should address Latino cultures in the United States, as well as, in the different countries of origin.

In addition, and in the interim, neutrality toward cultural differences, combined with good teaching, should be stressed and implemented.

Implementing a curriculum of inclusion that stresses Latino cultures in equivalent fashion to other cultures should obviously include Latino staff. However, the staff should cross all racial and ethnic groups for, as we found, having a Latino cultural background was not sufficient by itself nor a requirement for

cultural sensitivity.

We also recommended research into the following questions:

1.   To what extent does the upper echelon of the school support and legitimate (a) cultural difference?   (b) bilingual education?

2.   What evidence is there of this support?   (e.g., posters, special celebrations of different cultures, on-going cultural events)

General Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations that flow from the analysis, there were some particular recommendations made by the Fordham research group that are worthy of attention. They are listed in random order.

1.   Cross-cultural courses should be introduced as a requirement in all high schools to bridge the gap between the different ethnic and racial groups in the school. This would yield advantages in two areas: (a) this would encourage independent study among students and (b) would fill a lack within the schools.

Currently students interested in learning about their own culture (or any culture that is not a part of the mandated requirements for graduation) have to depend on an extra curricular clubs or other sources. Having a knowledgeable department with guidelines for study may encourage students to participate in such studies and learn about their own cultures, as well as the cultures of other groups in their schools.

2.   Schools should take seriously the teaching of Latino

cultures and not just celebrate multiculturalism in the abstract. Interestingly, this recommendation surfaced after visiting one of the schools that had a low Latino dropout rate. Laura said: *"An issue I found not to be addressed but to be one of most importance is a curriculum of inclusion. I began to wonder if the School A was successful in creating a happy and proud Latino that knew nothing about the contributions of their people. I wondered, is this a "nicer" way of assimilating Latinos?"*

3.   It is important to develop more extra-curricular activities and to ensure Latino access to all school activities.

4.   Safety also makes life easier. It is important to ensure safety in all of the schools and in the surrounding area.

5.   Parents should be involved in school, not necessarily by attending all the school meetings but by keeping a close eye on their child's attitude and activities, i.e., checking report cards, and attending parent/teacher night. It might also be useful to develop bilingual night programs that would be open to parents and students, wherein they could improve their work skills, e.g., computer courses, wordprocessing, ESL, workplace literacy, photography, etc. Day staff liaison should be available during these times, so parents could talk with them about their children.

6.   There should be more security guards at some schools, but they should be better trained.

7.   Students with economic disadvantages should be assisted economically so they don't dropout of high school, e.g., Coop programs and job training and placement programs that supplement

academic programs.

8. Teachers should be made more sensitive toward the situations and problems of their students.

9. Although a curriculum that stresses greater student independence was seen as a positive in our study, students also pointed out that it was important to be aware of the potential difficulties of implementing such programs in other schools. Such independence can also be a *'double-edged sword; it can encourage development or it can result in confusion and falling through the cracks. Negative outcomes will occur when a student is isolated...a student may drop out of school because s/he has not found the right person to speak with in the school."*

10. With regard to School B and similar schools, more cultural awareness of Latino culture needs to be developed. Although some schools celebrate certain Latino holidays, and others have an entire week dedicated to Latino cultures, there does not seem to exist a commitment from the administration to Latino cultural difference in the school.

11. All schools should encourage Latinos to apply to a variety of public and private four year colleges.

12. Schools should place more emphasis on directing borderline students towards resource centers and places they can receive additional assistance.

13. Culture clubs should be added and encouraged at schools where they do not presently exist.

14. There is a great deal of awareness of violence and crime

in public high schools today. However, there has been little
attention paid to how particular schools[9] became dangerous. We
recommend that the question of how schools shifted from a safe
environment to a climate of fear, violence and boredom be
researched.

As Lisa said: *"There will always be rebels, but if action is taken early on,
the unnecessary excess number of dropouts [and disruptions] can be cut down."* In
contrasting the two schools she had been to (B and D), she noted
that, in both schools, groups tend to get along. She remarked: *"If
students get along and are not fond of, but can handle their teachers then the root of the
problem must be keeping students inside the classroom engaged."* She noted that in
both schools boredom had come up several times and added that the
Fordham students had witnessed *"all different types of students, from the
uncooperative, uncaring, to the eager and interested. However, we were able to keep them
interested for at least 40 minutes. If teachers can do that every day of the year, students would
stay in school."*

EPILOGUE

In some ways, it is unusual that there are so few studies that
ask students what they think of their educational experience; and
fewer still that ask this of Latino students. This study has told
us that Latinos at these schools "know the deal." They know when
they are getting a good education and when they are not. They also

have some pretty good ideas on how to improve education. This study has concluded that, in the case of Latino dropouts: schools make the difference. The bottom line in this report is that: good neighborhoods or bad: good schools = success, bad schools cause dropouts.

This is an important finding and one we hope will be acted upon. Indeed, that is the main concern of all those who have been involved in the study. We have done this study out of a commitment to reduce Latino dropout and improve Latino education. Aside from the incentive that was provided to students for earning academic credit, no one involved with this research project received any direct compensation for their participation. An estimate of the costs that would have been incurred had this project been funded by a government or private foundation exceeds $100,000.

This project was also not undertaken just for research purposes or idle academic curiosity. Indeed, the research agenda of the project director was seriously derailed in order to accommodate this research study. No, this project was done, at tremendous personal cost and sacrifice, because all of those involved wanted to see "something happen" -- the title of another study on Hispanic education. Throughout the process, there has been concern expressed that this not be "just another report" that will be filed for mere archival research. Even the high school students we spoke with wanted to know "what's going to be done about it?" We submit this report with the hope that these findings

will not be overlooked, but will form the basis for thoughtful and
aggressive action.

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Spring, 1992   Dr. C. Rodriguez
Off. Hrs: W 1:30-3:00   Rm.: 921E
         Th 1:30-3:00   Tel: 636-6335

READING LIST - LATINO COMMISSION

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(LISTED IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY WERE COVERED)

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APPENDIX 3

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Latino Commission and Fordham University

Survey on the Latino Dropout Crisis

This survey is part of the efforts of the Latino Commission on Educational Reform to address issues of concern to Latino school children. The Commission was established by the Board of Education in the fall of 1991 to ensure that the growing numbers of Latino students are receiving appropriate, quality instruction in conditions conducive to education and to make recommendations that would help the Board to fulfill its commitment to Latino students.

We need your honest answers to the questions in this booklet. We need to find out what it is like to go to your school. There are no right or wrong answers. **THIS IS NOT A TEST.**

Your help in this study is important to us. You do not have to answer any question you don't want to. HOWEVER, NO ONE AT THE SCHOOL WILL EVER SEE YOUR ANSWERS. YOUR ANSWERS ARE **CONFIDENTIAL**.

If you have any questions at any time, ask us.

****

MARK ONE ANSWER IN THE SQUARE

1. How much do you like this school?

   |___|

   1. Very much
   2. Fairly much
   3. Not at all

2. Which of the following had the largest influence on your choice of a school?

   |___|

   1. My parents   4. Friends
   2. A guidance counselor 5. Someone else
   3. Teachers   6. Myself
   7. Other_____

3. Which of the following most influenced your choice of high school?

   |___|

   1. A special program   5. Location
   2. Its good reputation   6. I had no other choice
   3. Recommendation of someone in 2 above
   4. Other_____

1

4. What do you want to do most after you leave high school?

|___|

    1. Go to college   5. Join the armed forces
    2. Go to business school   6. Something else
    3. Go to trade school   7. I don't know   .
    4. Get a job

5. How much is school helping you get ready for what you want to do after high school?

|___|

    1. Very much   3, A little
    2. Some   4. Not at all
    5. I don't know what I want to do after high school.

6. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are.

|___|

    1. Almost always
    2. Sometimes
    3. Almost never

7. How many teachers here that you know treat students with respect?

|___|

    1. All   3. Few
    2. Most   4. None

8. Teachers here care about the students.

|___|

    1. Almost always
    2. Sometimes
    3. Almost never

9. The principal gets out of the office and talks with the students.

|___|

    1. Almost always
    2. Sometimes
    3. Almost never

10. There is so much noise in classes that the teachers can't teach.

|___|

    1. Almost always   3. Almost never
    2. Sometimes

2

11. How many times have you seen a counselor since last september?

|___|

1. Almost every week   3. Once or Twice
2. About once a month   4. Never

12. How much of the time are you afraid that someone will hurt or bother you at school? (Mark one answer)

|___|

1. most of the time   3. almost never
2. sometimes   4. never

13. How much of the time are you afraid that someone will hurt or bother you on the way to or from school? (Mark one answer)

|___|

1. most of the time   3. almost never
2. sometimes   4. never

14. In this school year, how many times have you seen a student hit or attack another student in the school?

|___|

1. almost every week   3. once or twice
2. about once a month   4. never

15. In this school year, how many times have you seen a student physically threaten a teacher in the school?

|___|

1. almost every week   3. once or twice
2. about once a month   4. never

16. In this school year, how much of the time have you seen an adult physically threaten a student?

|___|

1. almost every week   3. once or twice
2. about once a month   4. never

17. In this school, Latino culture is celebrated and respected.

|___|

1. Very much   3. A little
2. Some   4. Not at all
5. Other_____

18. Is there someone in school who inspires you to continue in school?

|___| 1. my friend   3. my teacher   (Continued)

3

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2. the principal   4. my counselor
5. no one
6. other_____

19. How much are the cultures of the different groups in this school discussed in the classroom?

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. Very much   3. A little
   2. Some   4. Not at all
   5. Other_____

20. Extracurricular activities in this school are

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. very important to me.
   2. pretty important to me.
   3. not too important to me.
   4. not at all important to me.
   5. I am not involved in any extracurricular activities.
   6. Other_____

21. Students in the school are not treated fairly because they speak Spanish.

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. Almost always   3. Almost never
   2. Sometimes   4. Not at all
   5. Other_____

22. Are you clear on what you have to do to graduate?

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. Yes   2. No   3. Somewhat
   4. Other, specify_____

23. My parents (or guardians) keep close track of how well I am doing in school.

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. most of the time   3. almost never
   2. sometimes   4. never

24. How would you describe yourself? (If more than one, please mark other and specify in the space provided.)

|‾‾|
|__|
   1. Black or African-American
   2. Hispanic or Spanish (Dominican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or other Latin American)
   3. Asian-American or Pacific Islander (Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Alaska Native, Native American Indian, etc.)

4

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4. White
5. Other, specify_____

25. In school it is uncomfortable to be the race or ethnic group that I belong to.

|⎯|
|⎯|
1. most of the time   3. almost never
2. sometimes   4. never

26. If so, who makes you feel uncomfortable? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)

|⎯| |⎯| |⎯| |⎯| |⎯|

1. students   2. teachers
3. principle   4. counselors
5. others_____

27. Outside of school it is uncomfortable to be the race or ethnic group that I am.

|⎯|
1. most of the time   3. almost never
2. sometimes   4. never

28. Students of my race or ethnic group are treated fairly in this school.

|⎯|
1. most of the time   3. almost never
2. sometimes   4. never

29. I am

|⎯|
1. male
2. female

30. My high school average so far is

|⎯|
1. A   3. C
2. B   4. D
5. F   6. I don't know.

31. I am a

|⎯|
1. 9th grader   2. 10th grader   3. 11th grader
4. 12th grader

5

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Latino Commission and Fordham University

Survey on the Latino Dropout Crisis

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the school "spirit"?
    Cual es el ambiente de la escuela?

2. What do you like MOST about going to school?
    Que es lo que MAS le gusta de esta escuela?

3. What do you like LEAST about going to school?
    Que es lo que MENOS le gusta de esta escuela?

4. What would you change about school to make it the ideal
    school? (supportive services, school programs, academic
    programs?)
    Que cambiaria de esta escuela para que pudiera ser la escuela
    ideal? (los programas academicos, servicios de los consejeros,
    programas escolares)

5. Why do you think Latinos drop out of this school?
    Por que cree Ud. que algunos estudiantes Latinos en esta
    escuela no terminan sus estudios?

6. Do you think the teachers are sensitive to Latino
    cultural differences? (Why or why not?)
    Cree Ud. que sus maestros son sensitivos a diferencias
    culturales Latinas?

7. Do you think the counselors are sensitive to Latino
    cultural differences? (Why or why not?)
    Cree Ud. que los consejeros en esta escuela son sensitivos a
    diferencias culturales Latinas?

8. How does your school handle truants? (Q.78-86)
    Que hace su escuela con los estudiantes que no atienden la
    escuela por mucho tiempo?

9. Why do you think students cut class? (Q.88)
    Por que cree Ud. que los estudiantes cortan clases?

10. What does the school do when students cut class? (role of
    security)
    Que hace la escuela cuando estudiantes cortan clase? (que
    hacen los guardias?

11. To what extent does the school attempt to involve parents of
    students to become involved in the school? How does it do

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this?
De cual manera trata la escuela de incluir los padres en las actividades de la escuela?

12. What does the school do to tell you about different college opportunities?
   Como le informa la escuela sobre oportunidades universitarias?

13. Do the different Latino groups get along with one another in this school?
   Se llevan los diferentes grupos Latinos en esta escuela?

14. Do the different racial groups get along with one another in this school?
   Se llevan los diferentes grupos raciales en esta escuela?

7

COMISION LATINO Y UNIVERSIDAD FORDHAM

Encuesta en sobre la crisis de estudiantes latinos que no terminan sus estudios.

1.   ¿Como le gusta esta escuela?

   1.   mucho
   2.   un poco
   3.   no me gusta

2.   ¿Cuales de las siguientes tuvo gran influencia en su selección de escuela?

   1.   Mis Padres
   2.   Un consejero
   3.   Profesores
   4.   Amigos(as)
   5.   Otra persona
   6.   Yo mismo
   7.   Otro _____

3.   ¿Cual de las siguientes tuvo mas influencia en su selección de escuela secundaria?

   1.   Un programa especial
   2.   Su buena reputación
   3.   Recomendación de alguien de la pregunta anterior
   4.   Otro _____
   5.   Localidad
   6.   No tuve otra opción

4.   ¿Que quiere hacer usted después de la escuela secundaria?

   1.   Ir a la universidad
   2.   Ir a una escuela de negocios
   3.   Ir a una escuela de comercio
   4.   Conseguir un trabajo
   5.   Participar en las fuerzas armadas
   6.   Otro cosa
   7.   no se

5.   ¿Cuanto le está ayudando su escuela a prepararse para lo que usted quiere hacer después de la escuela secundaria?

   1.   mucho
   2.   un poco
   3.   un poquito
   4.   nada
   5.   yo no se que quiero despues de la escuela secundaria

6. ¿El castigo para romper las reglas de la escuela es igual, no importa quien sea.

   1. casi siempre
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca

7. ¿Cuantos profesores aqui tratan a sus estudiantes con respeto?

   1. todos
   2. la mayoría
   3. pocos
   4. ningunos

8. Profesores se preocupan por sus estudiantes.

   1. casi siempre
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca

9. ¿El principal sale de su oficina y habla con los estudiantes?

   1. casi siempre
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca

10. Hay tanta bulla en clases que los profesores no pueden enseñar.

    1. casi siempre
    2. a veces
    3. casi nunca

11. ¿Cuantas veces ha visto a un consejero desde el pasado septiembre?

    1. casi todas las semanas
    2. una vez al mes
    3. una o dos veces
    4. nunca

12. ¿Cual mayoría del tiempo tiene miedo de que alguien lo lastime o lo moleste en la escuela?

    1. la mayoría del tiempo
    2. aveces
    3. casi nunca
    4. nunca

13. ¿Cual mayoría del tiempo tiene miedo de que alguien lo lastime en su ida or regreso de la escuela?

    1. la mayoría del tiempo
    2. a veces
    3. casi nunca
    4. nunca

14. ¿En este año escolar, cuantas veces ha visto a un estudiante asaltar a otro estudiante el la escuela?

    1. casi todas las semanas
    2. una vez al mes
    3. una o dos veces
    4. nunca

15. ¿En este año escolar, cuantas veces ha visto a un estudiante amenazar físicamente a un profesor en la escuela?

    1. casi todas las semanas
    2. una vez al mes
    3. una o dos veces
    4. nunca

16. ¿En este año escolar, cual mayoría del tiempo ha visto a un adulto amenazar físicamente a un estudiante?

    1. casi todas las semanas
    2. una vez al mes
    3. una o dos veces
    4. nunca

17. En esta escuela la cultura latina es celebrada y respetada.

    1. mucho
    2. un poco
    3. un poquito
    4. para nada
    5. otro _____

18. ¿Hay alguna person en la escuela que lo inspira a continuar en la escuela?

    1. mi amigo(a)
    2. mi profesor
    3. mi consejero
    5. nadie
    6. otro

19. ¿Cuanto tiempo las culturas de diferentes grupos son discutidas en los salones de esta escuela?

   1. mucho
   2. un poco
   3. un poquito
   4. nunca
   5. otro _____

20. Actividades fuera de la escuela son _____.

   1. muy importantes
   2. mas o menos importantes
   3. no tan importantes
   4. no importan
   5. no estoy envuelto en actividades fuera de la escuela
   6. otro _____

21. Estudiantes en esta escuela no son tratados justamente porque hablan español.

   1. casi siempre
   2. aveces
   3. casi nunca
   4. nunca
   5. otro _____

22. ¿Está claro lo que se tiene que hacer para graduarse?

   1. si
   2. no
   3. algo
   4. otro, especifíque _____

23. Mis padres (o guardianes) estan pendientes en como yo estoy haciendo en la escuela.

   1. la mayoría del tiempo
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca
   4. nunca

24. ¿Como se describiría usted?

   1. negro o africano americano
   2. Hispano o Latino
   3. Asiático Americano o de las islas Pacíficas
   4. Blanco
   5. Otro, especifíque

25. ¿En la escuela es incomodo ser de la raza o grupo etnico al que pertenezco?

   1. la mayoría del tiempo
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca
   4. nunca

26. ¿Si es así, quien lo hace sentir incomodo?

   1. estudiantes
   2. maestros
   3. el principal
   4. consejeros
   5. otro _____

27. Fuera de la escuela es incomodo ser de la raza o grupo étnico del que soy.

   1. la mayoría del tiempo
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca
   4. nunca

28. Estudiantes de mi raza o grupo etnico son tratados en esta escuela justamente.

   1. la mayoría del tiempo
   2. a veces
   3. casi nunca
   4. nunca

29. Yo soy

   1. varón (hombre)
   2. mujer (hembra)

30. Mi promedio hasta el momento en la escuela secundaria es:

   1. A (90-100)
   2. B (80-89)
   3. C (70-79)
   4. D (60-69)
   5. F (menos de 60)

31. Yo estoy en

   1. 9 grado
   2. 10 grado
   3. 11 grado
   4. 12 grado