# Shared Success

## Voices of First-Generation College-Bound Latino/as

*Noah Borrero*

### Introduction

Inquiry into the academic achievement of Latino/a youth in the United States should be of major interest to teachers, administrators, families, communities, scholars, and policy makers committed to equitable multicultural education in our schools. Not only are Latinos the most populous, fastest growing ethnic minority group in our public school schools, but the very word "minority" is no longer accurate when describing the population of students in many of our city's schools—they are, by far, the majority in many communities (Fix & Passel, 2003; García & Jensen, 2009; Gifford & Valdes, 2007; Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000).

Although the diversity of Latinos is well documented (García & Jensen, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rios, 2008), academic achievement discourse continues to lump the group together and compare achievement outcomes between Latino students and White students. This reliance on research that illuminates this "achievement gap" serves to alienate Latinos, and other youth of color, as the culprits in an educational arena that is broken yet fearful of change (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Freedman, Brookhart, & Loadman, 1999; Kozol, 2005; Nieto, 2002). If we, as educators, cannot counter this narrative of "us versus them" (Fine & Weis, 2003) with provocative and rigorous research that shows the successes of students of color in our schools, then we become complicit in the inequities in our system (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2010).

In this article, that all too common narrative is challenged by presenting the voices of a group of Latino/a public high

*Noah Borrero is an assistant professor of teacher education in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.*

school seniors who are graduating and will be attending four-year colleges and universities. As first-generation college-bound students, their voices tell of the immense excitement and responsibility that they feel as a result of achieving this academic goal while also revealing the challenges they have overcome and the support systems they have utilized to get to this place.

Their voices are presented to show that there are success stories to be told about the academic achievement of Latino youth, and to reveal the strong cultural pride that they feel as students who have beaten the odds and who want to share their successes with their families and communities.

### Latino Academic Achievement

Although there is relatively limited research documenting the academic success of Latino students in public schools in the United States (see Borrero, 2011; Cabrera & Padilla, 2001), there is not doubt that they are the most populous cultural group in many schools across the country (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; Rios, 2008, Thomas & Collier, 2002). In educational literature, much of the research focuses on Latino students' English language development (e.g., Crawford & Krashen, 2007; García & Jensen, 2009; Gifford & Valdes, 2007) and academic achievement (Fry, 2003; Garcia & Menken, 2006; Reardon & Galindo, 2006).

Along with data that show that Latinos are more likely to live in poverty and attend under-performing schools than their peers, research tells us that Latinos comprise the greatest percentage of English language learners (ELLs) in schools (García & Jensen, 2009). The relationship between these two foci—language learning and academic achievement—is obvious, but important. Many Latino students are learning English while trying to learn academic content in school, and are, therefore,

struggling to keep up (Borrero & Bird, 2009; Crawford & Krashen, 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2007).

This reality is supported by data on the achievement gap between Caucasian and Latino students, and by research that documents the school experiences of students learning English in public schools (e.g., Borrero, 2006; Garcia & Menken, 2006; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Valdés, 2001). Of course, what is also a reality, is that these students' academic achievement is solely measured in English, on tests that are likely assessing their English proficiency just as much as their understanding of academic concepts. So language and achievement are important and connected aspects of Latino students' experiences at school, but they are not the only factors that we as educators and researchers must attend to.

### Cultural Connections between Home and School

The cultural experiences that many Latino students navigate daily are both complex and multi-faceted. Not only do they experience different linguistic worlds between home and school, but they may be the first from their families to attend U.S. schools and learn about the cultural expectations that define schooling here. Research shows that in many cases, these different cultural worlds are separate and isolated (Deschenes, Tyack, & Cuban, 2001; Valdés, 2001). Youth are left to bear the burden of this isolation and can come to feel lost in between their academic and cultural worlds or that they need to choose between being academic or being a member of their cultural group (Borrero et al., 2010, 2010; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Nieto, 2002; Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001).

School must be a context where all youth feel welcome, and adults at school (teachers, administrators, support staff,

etc.) must recognize the disconnect that youth face, honor the diversity of students' backgrounds, and find ways to utilize the wealth of multicultural resources that can promote student learning (Borrero & Bird, 2009).

To foster this type of discourse around schooling, the current research is framed in a sociocultural approach to learning (Nieto, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978), stressing the need to acknowledge the multiple social contexts that youth navigate each day (inside and outside of school) as learning opportunities (Morales & Hanson, 2006; Tse, 1995). For Latino youth, and many youth of color, this approach to learning is important because it creates possibilities for finding connections between students' cultural lives at home and at school.

For example, Nieto (2002) discusses the importance of teachers believing in every single one of their students as a tenet of a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. To do this, teachers (and schools) need to find ways to build upon the learning that students are doing outside of school in the classroom. Researchers have discussed such teaching approaches as culturally-relevant and pedagogies of caring (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).

Additionally, there is a growing body of literature on Latino youth who serve as bilingual translators and interpreters for monolingual adults (parents, teachers, etc.). Researchers are investigating the impact of these "language brokering" activities and the role of being a "language broker" on youths' academic development (Borrero, 2006; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Tse, 1995).

This approach to youths' multicultural backgrounds as a potential asset in school is vital for student learning, as it attempts to disrupt the "us versus them" (Fine & Weis, 2003) mentality and the portrait of the idealized, prototypical student (Rist, 1970) by embracing the cultural capital that many youth bring with them to school. Research discusses the importance of fostering such assets, or funds of knowledge, for youth as a way to make them feel that they belong at school and to increase their learning (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Blythe, 1998; Borrero, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

For Latino youth, such assets come in many forms. There is the linguistic asset, and the fact that students who are labeled ELL (and therefore often stigmatized) at school, are also burgeoning bilinguals. There is also the asset of family and com-

munity cohesion and solidarity (Borrero, 2006). The role of resilience in the lives of many Latino youth is also documented in the literature as a cultural strength that many Latino youth carry with them to school (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

There are many other cultural assets that Latino youth, and youth from other ethnic backgrounds, possess, and the importance of this asset-approach in schools is that it creates opportunities to talk about the successes of students in a way that is not pathological and improbable—instead, it values the multiple resources that promote student learning, and positions school as a context to enhance this learning (Valenzuela, 1999).

## Method
### The Community and the School

Bay City, California—the community in which all of the students in this study reside and grew up—has approximately 30,000 residents. Around 70% of the residents are Latino/a, 20% are African American, and seven percent are Pacific Islanders (United States Census Bureau, 2000). The district high school that was located in the community was closed in the 1970s, so students from Bay City are enrolled in a neighboring high school district for grades 9-12. For some students, this means riding the bus for up to 45 minutes each way to school each day. It is approximated that the dropout rate for Bay City students may be as high as 65%.

All participants in the study attended the Bay City Academy, a public charter school that serves students in grades 9-12. Enrollment is open to any student in Bay City and surrounding communities, and there is no tuition. Just like a district school, the Academy does not select students. The school was founded in 2006 by a group of parents and teachers who wanted

their children to have a higher quality education than they saw the district schools being able to provide.

The Academy serves 145 students in grades 9-12. One hundred percent of the student population are students of color, 100% are first-generation college-bound, and 93% qualify for free-or-reduced lunch. Approximately 90% of students are Latino/a. (For a more detailed description of the school and its K-8 affiliate see Borrero, 2006, 2011).

### Participants

Participants in the study included eight 12th grade students at the Bay City Academy (four females and four males—average age 17.5 years old). All eight students lived in the Bay City community and were re-designated ELLs of Mexican heritage. All students spoke Spanish at home and were either immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Students were selected for the study based on their willingness to be interviewed. Of the 16 Latino/a 12th graders, eight returned consent forms for participation in the study. These eight students were interviewed. For a list of students, their ages, and the type of university they will be attending in the fall, see Table 1.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted by the author, taking place at school, and in the English language. Interviews lasted approximately 30-to-40 minutes and were held in March—just as students were receiving acceptance letters from universities. Interviews centered on students' acceptance to college and their high school experiences. Questions focused on five main areas: college/future plans, greatest successes, greatest challenges, key factors to academic successes, and community/cultural connections.

Data were analyzed using grounded

**Table 1**
**Participants**

| Name | Age | College/University Type and Location |
|---|---|---|
| Angel | 17 | Public, within-state University |
| Carmen | 17 | Private, out-of-state College |
| Eddie | 18 | Public, out-of-state University |
| Jaime | 17 | Public, within-state University |
| Linda | 18 | Public, within-state University |
| Lucia | 17 | Public, within-state University |
| Manuel | 18 | Public, within-state University |
| Paul | 18 | Public, out-of-state University |

theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by a team of two raters—the author and a research assistant who was not involved in the data collection. Before coding, each rater read and reread the interview transcripts independently (Merriam, 1988). Next, each rater began to underline recurring units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from the data. Units were phrases, sentences, or longer quotes that shed light on students' college plans, their experiences in the community and at school, their feelings about academic successes and challenges, and their reflections on being Latino/a. From these units, each rater began to form categories. These categories were concepts that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and began to more specifically address factors like students' perceptions of college and their reflections on the importance of family.

The raters then met to discuss their preliminary codes and began to investigate themes to which these codes spoke. Using grounded theory, central themes were explored in depth (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and subcategories were discussed. Raters then re-read the transcripts and field notes and color-coded sections that elucidated the central themes from the discussion with the other raters. This was more selective coding—looking to identify commonalities and differences within themes.

The raters then met to discuss final themes. The discussion lasted until consensus was reached, and each rater did one final read through to determine quotes that spoke directly to the agreed-upon themes—college talk, dynamic family roles, school as a support system, and community resources. These identified quotes were selected for inclusion in the results section because they exposed the nature of a given theme (Glesne, 1999). These quotes are not necessarily representative of those from all eight students.

## Results

Interview data revealed four core themes about students' perceptions of being college-bound: *college talk*, *dynamic family roles*, *school as a support system*, and *community resources*. These themes are discussed below along with representative quotes from the interviewees. The quotes which follow are not intended to represent traits which can be generalized to all Latino/as or first-generation college-bound youth, but rather to give voice to the eight participants of this study and showcase their thoughts and feelings about graduating from high school and heading off to college.

### College Talk

All eight participants were both knowledgeable and purposeful in the ways they talked about college. This meant that they used "college-going" terminology about acceptance letters, majors, dorm assignments, and scholarships (among others). They also talked about college in a way that showed it was a goal they had been working towards for years, and it was something that did not come easily.

*Fulfilling dreams and facing reality.* Students spoke about college as the next step in their lives. They were excited that they had recently been accepted to college and they were looking forward to getting their high school diploma and moving on to the next level academically. In talking about their academic aspirations, students did not discuss college as the end goal. Carmen,[1] for example said,

> I have family who has graduated from high school, but I'll be the first one attending college—not only attending college but hopefully graduating from college. And getting my Masters degree, because I really want my Masters degree.

Echoing this sentiment of college as a long-term goal and the next level of accomplishment, students expressed pride in themselves and their families, and a belief that college was key for their future. Lucia, for example, talked about college being the next step to helping her become the person she wants to be:

> …yeah, my dreams of just being somebody in life…I think I have always wanted to be somebody important in life, but like when I really think about it, I want to give my mom everything she gave me. More than that—I want to help her out, help the family out.

This shared sense of accomplishment put students' filial and cultural contexts in perspective—for most, they are the first in their families to go to college, and they feel both pride and responsibility as a part of this opportunity.

Along with these feelings of excitement and pressure, students also reflected on the upcoming realities of going to college. The prospect of leaving home was one such reality as was the financial burden of college. All eight students mentioned the cost of college as a reality that faced them. Paul, for example, said, "I'm excited…but I'm worried. I need to find some scholarships." Others spoke of money as a concern facing them and their families, and it was something that was certainly a part of how they talked about college and what it meant to them.

*Overcoming odds.* In talking about college as a goal and long-term quest, all eight students discussed the challenges they overcame to get to this point. Many students talked about academic troubles, feeling like they couldn't make it, and losing any motivation to try at school. Angel talked about a time when she was "feeling invisible" and that she "didn't belong" at school, and Lucia said that there was a point in time when she just felt "overwhelmed" and that she "didn't want to go to school anymore." Others spoke about pivotal school experiences that they recall making a difference. Manuel, for example, shared:

> I remember I was starting to head towards the wrong path, very fast. I was in 5th grade and I was already doing fighting and doing other stuff… The principal at the time, Mr. Cano—I still remember him—he told me, 'either you leave on your will or you will get expelled and I don't think you want an expulsion on your record'…so I left and then I started thinking more logically and I started thinking about consequences.

In addition to reflecting on their academic struggles, students discussed challenges they had overcome with their peers, their families, and in the community. Angel shared about her strong desires to attend college—not just for herself, but for her father:

> My dad passed away last September, so that made me want to do this even more…He would tell me, 'I want you to go to college and do all of this stuff.' But there were times I felt no one cared. My mind was on him the whole time.

All eight students shared multiple experiences that they had overcome during their journey towards college. Interestingly, they talked about multiple support systems in place that kept them going—friends, teachers, family, and their own motivation.

### Dynamic Family Roles

As expressed above, the value and priority that students placed on family was paramount. Students' excitement in talk-

ing about their college plans was tempered by a distinct anxiety about leaving home and the impact that it would have on the family. This tension between wanting to make the family proud by going to college yet not wanting to leave the family was expressed by every student.

*Family pride.* There is no doubt that all eight students felt tremendous pride in themselves and their families, as their college acceptance was something that belonged to the whole family. In talking about how he was able to achieve the goal of going to college, Eddie said,

> My family came to the U.S. looking for a better living… soon to realize, if you want to have a better living you need to educate yourself. And you know, just the fact that my mom never went to college or even graduated from high school; I think all of this comes into play—you know, me just wanting to make her proud.

In a similar way, Paul talked about college representing a way for him to play his part in the family. He expressed going to college as,

> the chance to be able to give back to my parents. For 30 plus years my dad has been killing himself at work to give me a chance at what most kids might not have…my sister also had this opportunity to go to college, but she got mixed up with the wrong people and my parents have always feared that I would do the same. So this is like my way of telling them, 'I'm me. I do me. I don't follow someone else.'

Like Paul, others shared stories of siblings or relatives who hadn't made it to college or through college. They compared themselves to these family members, but again, discussed their acceptance into college as a source of pride for the whole family—even those who had not made it in the past. Manuel shared,

> My brothers dropped out, my sister dropped out…but in my household, it's not like that's an excuse…So I was always motivated by them, you know, they said "ust because we didn't do it doesn't mean you can't." So together we can say "at least someone in the family can do it. We can prove that my family is not made of failures."

*Supportive and supporting family.* Along with this tremendous pride that students shared for their families, they discussed how their families' support for them has gotten them to where they are, and how they plan to reciprocate this support. Of his parents' reaction to being accepted to college, Paul said,

> They are looking a little weird. You know, Mom is flipping out and Dad doesn't know how to react. Everyday when my Mom comes home from work, she hugs me, she gives me a kiss, and she's all, 'I don't know what I'm going to do when you leave'…My family, everyone is happy, but then again, they don't want me to leave.

Alongside this tension surrounding college and leaving home, students expressed a level of honor and responsibility to utilize the opportunity as a way to take care of the family. Jaime, for example, shared the pride that his older brother had for him upon hearing about his college decision,

> he's down in the Marines right now, so he tells me to, like, carry on—you know, the family. He told me to be the man of the house and, you know, go to college, get a degree, and take care of the family.

### School as a Support System

All eight students named specific teachers that helped them reach their college goals. Such discussions focused on teachers who believed in them, helped them stay focused on their goals, and pushed them when they needed it. A few students focused on academics when describing teacher support, yet all students shared some experience needing emotional support to overcome academic failure to eventually find success at school. Additionally, students spoke of their peers as providing an important support network at school.

*School failure.* Students talked about very difficult academic times in their lives. Carmen discussed getting kicked out of a different school during her sophomore year—before coming to the Bay City Academy. Linda talked about leaving the Bay Academy for another school and then coming back because, "nobody knew me over there. If I did my homework or not, it didn't matter. They didn't care." Inversely, students shared difficult times at the Bay City Academy as well. Linda said,

> I didn't want to come back here at all. I wanted to be out with my friends, and here we were staying in school till 4:30…I didn't want to be here. Just the teachers and everyone—I was tired of seeing the same people.

*School as family.* In addition to feeling stifled at times by the same teachers and small class size at the Bay City Academy, students expressed a great appreciation for the sense of community that they felt at school. They even described their school network (mostly referring to friends and

teachers) as their second family. When talking about their peers, they didn't just mention one or two close friends, but talked about their whole class of graduating seniors.

Their sentiment was not that the school was idyllic, but rather, that they had come together as a community—a group that had made sacrifices, overcome challenges, and enjoyed successes together. Angel, for example, said,

> I think it's been even more difficult since it's a new school and everything. We didn't get to play sports or anything like that, but we made the best out of it. We had fun these four years, and we know each other like family.

Students considered teachers to be a part of this family as well. All of the eight students talked about specific teachers who helped support them through the good and bad times. Again, many of these descriptions were not just about academic support, but reflected the strong relationships that students felt at school. Of one teacher, Manuel shared,

> Mr. Pinnel—he's been my backbone. He's helped me out through all my problems—personal problems and problems at school. Like, now that I am older, he doesn't tell me how to solve them, he just leads me to solve my own problems. He gives me suggestions like man to man, not teacher to student.

### Community Resources

As students talked about going off to college and leaving home, many of them reflected on the Bay City community as one that taught them a lot. They expressed the challenges that living in Bay City posed (namely the low expectations and high drop out rate), but they also talked about the strong cultural connection that they felt to Bay City as Latinos and their desires to give back to the community.

*Cultural belonging.* In addition to their strong filial ties, students discussed the importance of the Latino community in Bay City. They talked about feeling at home in their city because of the Mexican markets and the presence of Spanish all around them, and they also talked about what it meant for them to be Latino in this community. Linda said,

> It's something that is around me every day—my culture—like, the food, the music, the language. And it's not just that—the traditions—like Cinco de Mayo and Christmas and stuff. It's always going to be pres-

ent in my life and I don't want to lose my roots. I will always come back here.

Similarly, other students spoke of the Latino community in Bay City as a network of families with similar values. Eddie said,

It's the way we raise our kids. It's about family. Family comes first. If you're a father you can show your kids what a father is. You're not going to leave them behind.

Students also discussed how being Latino and from Bay City came with both challenges and opportunities. Carmen shared,

When people said I wasn't going to make it, or I was just another Latina from [Bay City] either not graduating or not even going to college; I guess all those phrases in school are the one that really made me say 'you know what, I'm going to show you. I'm going to prove you wrong.'

Lucia also expressed the idea of overcoming obstacles as a Latina in the community, but also said that she noticed a lot of opportunities once she began applying for college:

I think it's an advantage in a way. Like, there are so many scholarships for Latinas and Hispanic minorities and stuff. And in college, I even saw there was a, what do you call it, sorority group?

*Overcoming perceptions and giving back.* Like Carmen's quote above, many students talked about obstacles in the Bay City community—not just as Latinos, but as youth. Jaime, for example, said,

the community is full of students who drop out of high school. So, you know, I have them all around me. It was hard 'cause I would start to think that I didn't want to go to school either.

Others expressed this sentiment of being pulled down by some of the factors in their community, but they also expressed a strong desire to give back. Manuel portrayed this tension when he shared:

The stereotypical male of [Bay City] is the person I don't want to be—who I don't want to become. I want to show how [Bay City] has that different side—that side that I come from. Like, going to college and coming back and giving back to the community. I'm having a different life than my friends.

This desire to come back and give back to the Bay City community was common for all students, as they expressed college as a vehicle to have something to offer their community. Lucia (with a smile on her face by the end) said,

I'll always come back to [Bay City]. Like, this is where I grew up, like, I want to come back and help by donating money or something—to the streets, you know a program or something. Like this is where I come from…and I'll always be back. This is where my family's at…I want to be, like, the mayor.

Manuel expressed his desires to come back to Bay City as well, but he did so through talking about how he feels he has been able to learn from his experiences in the community while pursuing his academic aspirations:

…a lot of my friends used to say, 'oh, they're going to college and they're going to get out of [Bay City] because they are scared and can't hang on the streets.' Like, I kind of proved I can hang in the streets and now I want to prove that I can hang with my education.

## Discussion

These students' voices are captivating on many levels. First, these students are first-generation college-bound Latinos at a public high school in an urban community in California. The ability to capture their feelings about their own successes and challenges is important because stories of Latino students' academic achievements are missing in educational literature (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Nieto, 2002). Thus, these students' quotes show that there are Latino youth succeeding in public schools, heading off to college, and taking pride in their achievements. Such successes need to become more a part of the discourse surrounding academic achievement and youth of color (Darling-Hammond, 2007) in our public schools.

On another level, the themes presented above—college talk, dynamic family roles, school as a support system, and community resources—show that, for these eight students, being a first-generation college-bound student is complex and multi-faceted. The themes reveal the excitement, pride, and enthusiasm that these youth feel right alongside the pressure, anxiety, and responsibility that they feel to themselves, their families, and their communities. This tension is important to document as it reflects the tumultuous academic journey that most of these students have traveled to reach this place of academic success (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Students discussed feeling silenced and distanced from school (Fine & Weis, 2003; Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001) and they also expressed the tremendous relation-

ships that they built with teachers and peers at school (Borrero & Bird, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Similarly, they discussed the cultural disconnect between home and school and having to take on adult-like roles at home when they were being treated like little kids at school (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Valdés, 2001). Yet, they were able to find connections between their school, home, and community lives that made them feel they could succeed (Benson et al., 1998; Moll et al., 1992). They all expressed that this was not easy, but they felt they had support—from family, friends, and teachers—that made it possible.

It is this sense of connectedness—between home, school, and community—that is central to the themes presented above. The fact that students talked about college as a shared success—something that their whole family helped them to achieve and therefore needed to take pride in—shows that these youth connect their academic success with their family's support (Borrero, 2011; Valdés, 2001). Similarly, the fact that they talked about school (especially teachers and students) as a family shows that they feel cared for and they feel comfortable with who they are at school. This is something that so many Latino youth, and other youth of color, never feel at school (Deschenes et al., 2001; Nieto, 2002; Olsen, 2009; Rios, 2008; Valdés, 2001).

And lastly, the fact that they connected their pride in going to college with the pride in their community and their Latino identity shows that their academic goals are aligned with their cultural participation and sense of belonging (Borrero et al., 2010; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Nieto, 2002). These connections between different sociocultural contexts show that these youth have succeeded academically because their lives (and learning) outside of school have enhanced their learning in the classroom.

This promotion of students' assets is imperative, and it is reflected in the way that these youth talk about college. Going to college is not an individual, personalized endeavor for these students. Instead, it is something that they want for themselves, their school, their family, and their community. All eight students talked about coming back to Bay City after college to give back to the community. This shows their commitment to their families and their commitment to make a difference for others. The true test of these students' success will come in the years to come—as they attend, graduate, and move on from

college—but it is clear, at this point, that they want to share their successes with the people and places who got them there.

### Implications

It is important to note that these findings are intended to represent the voices of these eight students, and should not be generalized to all first-generation college-bound youth, Latinos, or other youth of color in urban schools. Further, these students attended a small school that is likely different from the urban high schools that many students of color attend. However, the importance of these students' voices cannot be diminished by their context. They are going to college and their stories need to be told because of their successes.

In addition to adding this narrative of successful urban youth of color to the discourse in multicultural education, this research has implications for how we as educators envision, discuss, implement, and assess student learning. Clearly, the youth in this study met the requirements of going to college—they passed their classes, passed the California High School Exit Exam, scored adequately on their SATs, completed their university applications, etc.—but these interviews reveal another story of their success. These students succeeded because their academic lives were a part of their lives at home and in their community. This finding can have far-reaching impact in today's era of high-stakes testing and school/teacher accountability, as it shows that we, as educators, need to think more broadly about our school communities.

We must embrace the multicultural backgrounds of our youth for the tremendous resources that they are. We must foster students' cultural and community pride at school instead of expecting all students to fit into pre-determined roles and expectations of what it means to be a student (Rist, 1970). And, finally, we must provide opportunities for all students to succeed at something in school. Today's focus on standards, testing, and data in education may make these goals more challenging, but these eight students show that, without doubt, they are achievable.

### Note

[1] Names of students are pseudonyms to protect privacy.

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