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Factors That Latino High School Students Identify as Influencing Their Graduation From an Urban High School and Their Decision to Enter a Post-Secondary Institution

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Abstract

In the early 1990s, there were five million Latino students enrolled in America's public schools. A decade later, this number had doubled in size. Presently, over 50% of Latino students attend urban schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods with high crime rates, welfare dependency, and educational failure. With this increase in the enrollment of Latino students and the associated impact on the American workforce, it is necessary to ensure that Latino students achieve the educational standards required to succeed in the workforce. This phenomenological qualitative study examined the factors and influences that contribute to Latino high school seniors graduating from an urban high school and their enrollment in a post-secondary institution. The study identified the themes and patterns that emerged from in-depth interviews with a sample of nine Hispanic students, four males and five females. The findings provide insight into the environmental and inner challenges that Latino students faced during their high school years. The motivating factors and strategies of the Latino students identified as influencing their high school graduation were: understanding self, desire to be better than their parents, parents' encouragement, extra-curricular school activities, and the desire to move out of their community. Their narratives identified the environmental factors that played a major role in their lives, and the Latino students' resilience and growth mindset were portrayed in their stories. vi Recommendations are to further research Latino students and their families to lead to the development of prevention and intervention programs that build resiliency. In addition, further research should be done to influence educational and political policies to support academic and social well-being for English Language Learners.

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Factors That Latino High School Students Identify as Influencing Their Graduation From

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Dedication

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Biographical Sketch

Nellie Martinez is currently a high school English teacher. Ms. Martinez attended Albany University from 1991 to 1995 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1996. She attended Mercy College from 2003 to 2005 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in School Administration & Supervision in 2005. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2012 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Martinez pursued her research in, The Factors That Latino High School Students Identify as Influencing Their Graduation From an Urban High School and Their Decision to Enter a Post-Secondary Institution, under the direction of Dr. Frances Wills and Dr. Shelley Jallow and received the Ed.D. Degree in 2015.

Abstract

In the early 1990s, there were five million Latino students enrolled in America's public schools. A decade later, this number had doubled in size. Presently, over 50% of Latino students attend urban schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods with high crime rates, welfare dependency, and educational failure. With this increase in the enrollment of Latino students and the associated impact on the American workforce, it is necessary to ensure that Latino students achieve the educational standards required to succeed in the workforce.

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the factors and influences that contribute to Latino high school seniors graduating from an urban high school and their enrollment in a post-secondary institution. The study identified the themes and patterns that emerged from in-depth interviews with a sample of nine Hispanic students, four males and five females.

The findings provide insight into the environmental and inner challenges that Latino students faced during their high school years. The motivating factors and strategies of the Latino students identified as influencing their high school graduation were: understanding self, desire to be better than their parents, parents' encouragement, extra-curricular school activities, and the desire to move out of their community. Their narratives identified the environmental factors that played a major role in their lives, and the Latino students' resilience and growth mindset were portrayed in their stories.

Recommendations are to further research Latino students and their families to lead to the development of prevention and intervention programs that build resiliency. In addition, further research should be done to influence educational and political policies to support academic and social well-being for English Language Learners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

With the increasing population of Latino residents, how can the United States foster their successful participation in the economy through educational achievement? The U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projected that by the year 2050, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans will comprise an estimated 50% of the nation's demographics, with the Hispanic population projected to be the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. It is estimated that Latinos will account for about one in every four of the over 400 million Americans by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In the 1993-94 school year, about five million Latino students were enrolled in America's public schools; and by the 2005-06 school year, that number doubled (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). The magnitude of this demographic change will have a substantial impact on the economic and social well-being of the nation for the foreseeable future (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

With this increase in the enrollment of Hispanic students and the associated impact on the American economy, it is necessary to ensure that Hispanic students achieve the educational standards required to succeed in the workforce. However, statistics show that, at present, a significant achievement gap exists between Latino students and their White counterparts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). This achievement gap indicates the need for attention to this problem and to develop proposals for prevention and intervention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). In fact, Latino high school

students are behind in graduation, literacy, and college preparedness rates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Although the overall dropout rate declined for high school students from 12% in 1990 to 7% in 2011, Latinos continue to lag behind (National Center Educational Statistics, 2012). Between 1990-2011, the Latino dropout rate decreased from 32% to 14%, compared to Black students with a decrease of 13% to 7%, and White students with a decrease of 9% to 5% (Appendix A, Figure 1) (NCES, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012), the high school graduation rate for Latinos in 2010 was about 63%, compared to 84.2% for Blacks and 87.6% for Whites (Appendix A, Figure 2).

To fully understand the context of the dropout rate, it is important to point out that more than 50% of Latinos attend urban public high schools (Simon, Lewis, Uro, Uzzell, Palacios, & Casserly, 2011). The majority of urban schools are located in neighborhoods that have high poverty and crime rates as well as significant rates of welfare dependency and educational failure (Simon et al., 2011). Only 20% of Latino students leave high school prepared for college, compared to 40% of Whites (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). While White students surpass Latinos in college enrollment, there has been a 15% increase in 2011 of 18-24 year-old Latino students enrolled in college (Fry, 2011).

In order to accurately describe the development and evolution of the Hispanic population in the United States, it is important to review its historical roots. The Hispanic population, also known as Latino, reflects a designation that identifies the population originating from Spanish-speaking people in Latin America, comprising Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominican, and Central and South Americans (Ortiz,

Valerio, & Lopez, 2012). Ortiz et al. (2012) claimed that the largest Hispanic groups in the United States are Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. A large number of Hispanics have been living in the U.S. since the Mexican War of 1846 to 1848 (Lapsansky, Levy, Roberts, & Taylor, 2008). Further, Lapsansky et al. (2008) stated that, during the early 20th century, there was a large influx of Mexicans who came to work in construction and agriculture in the mid and west coast, following crops from state to state. After World War II, many Latinos from other countries migrated to the U.S., settling in urban areas (Lapsansky et al., 2008). In the 1960s Latinos fought for equal rights, demanding better working conditions, salaries, and educational opportunities (Lapsansky et al., 2008). Today, Latinos continue to deal with similar challenges and issues (Ortiz et al., 2012).

Despite the challenges they face, there are factors that have influenced some Latino students, leading them to overcome challenges and achieve their goals. This study examines the factors that propel Latino students to successfully graduate from an urban high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. The researcher examines and provides evidence suggesting specific personal traits, cultural beliefs, and other environmental factors that affect the experience of Latino students who pursue graduation from an urban high school and higher educational institutions. Research-based theories, such as ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and resilience theory (Killian, 2004; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2000; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Rutter, 1987) as well as Dweck's (2006) research in growth mindsets offer rich and robust models for understanding the persistence of some Latino students who graduate from urban high schools and pursue further study in post-secondary institutions. While

graduation rates for Latinos lag substantially behind, at 63%, compared to the U.S. average of 78.2%, some students manage to succeed (Ortiz et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

Graduating from high school is a significant milestone of adolescent development and a critical predictor of future success (Chun & Dickson, 2011). Although an estimated 1.3 million students fail to graduate from school, overall graduation rates continue to rise (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education, in 2013, showed high school graduation rates are at their highest level since 1974. According to the report, during the 2009-10 school year, 78.2% of high school students, nationwide, graduated on time, which is a 4.8% increase from the 73.4% of high school students recorded in the 2005-06 school year. The report showed graduation rates were up for all ethnic groups in 2010, and the rate for Hispanic students increased almost 10% since 2006. Reflecting the higher graduation rates, the high school dropout rate declined from 12% in 1990 to 7% in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). However, despite the decline of the nationwide dropout rate, Latino students continue to drop out at about four times the rate of White youth (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

In 2005, only 58% of Latino students graduated on time, compared to 78% of Whites (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2009). The gap between the White and Latino graduation rate has been attributed to a variety of factors. Chun and Dickson (2011) asserted that low socioeconomic and cultural factors embedded in familial norms and values have a significant influence on student persistence in school. Combined with the conditions of urban schools that include limited resources, less-qualified teachers, and fewer educational program options, these socio-cultural factors contribute to poor

academic performance and disruption of high school academic success (Chun & Dickson, 2011). In addition, the researchers stated that there are gaps between home and school, differences in language, values, and expectations. For example, students who reside in a high-crime and poverty neighborhood are more likely to engage in negative behavior, resulting in school suspension (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Gregory et al. (2010) argued that school suspension has also contributed to lower academic performance. Furthermore, teachers have lower expectations for Latino students than European-American students, contributing to low academic performance for the Latino student population (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Behnke, Gonzalez, and Cox (2010) reported that the quality of school work, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure, and the need to work to help the family financially have also contributed to Latino students dropping out of high school.

It is clear, therefore, that there is an urgent need for interventions to counter the factors that inhibit the success of Hispanic students, and that will help lead to school achievement, graduation from high school, and enrollment in post-secondary education. Orfield and Lee (2007) argued that the growing population of Latino and Black students finds themselves attending segregated schools more frequently than in the 1960s. There is evidence that these segregated minority schools are served by less-qualified teachers, produce lower average test scores, and teach a less-competitive curriculum, resulting in lower graduation rates (Orfield & Lee, 2007). If there is a consensus that the nation's future depends on a well-educated population, as Orfield & Lee (2007) indicated, research and policy need to focus on finding ways to change failing schools to attain higher levels of achievement and prepare the students to work in a diverse society.

Several programs and policies have been introduced to attempt to "close the achievement gap" and to provide educational equity for minority students. In 2001, the United States Congress enacted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in order to close achievement gaps among various student groups and improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002). The purpose of the NCLB Act is "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, [and] significant opportunity to obtain a quality education" (NCLB, 2002). NCLB led to many interventions; however, it did not close the achievement gap (Oritz et al., 2012). Other federal programs, such as Project Grad and Futures & Families, focus on achievement, promotion, and graduation of Latino students (Oritz et al., 2012). The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) (2012) also emerged from NCLB and its next generation reform, Race to the Top (RTTT) (2009), to impact the achievement gap and raise expectations for all students. The premise of the CCLS (2012) is based on evidence that American students are lacking the skills to be prepared for college or a career in a highly competitive global economy. The Common Core Learning Standards have been created to provide students with a high-quality education (CCLS, 2012). The assumption of the CCLS is that they provide American public schools with a set of rigorous standards that, if followed and taught with fidelity, will ensure consistent educational quality and equal opportunity for all students on a national scale, reducing the inequities of individual state standards.

The CCLS provide precepts, learning expectations, and specific procedures to be used at every grade level so that students throughout the nation can experience the same level of education (CCLS, 2012). However, there is research indicating that in order to

lessen the achievement gap and the dropout rate for Latino students, there should be an increase in Spanish-speaking staff and teachers, academic and personal support, and improved English as a second-language class (Behnke et al., 2010). Furthermore, this research suggests that one of the determinants of educational achievement is defined as social and cultural capital. Social capital refers to social networks, relationships, language, and money; whereas, cultural capital can consist of many influential components such as style, manner, music, art, and literature (Behnke et al., 2010). Both social capital and cultural capital may be provided through school programs, extracurricular activities, and school partnerships with business or colleges (Behnke et al., 2010). Using another lens to understand the plight of Latino youth, Simon et al. (2011) identified other areas that may contribute to developing programs that can further help understand the achievement gap and guide future work with Latino youth: issues around the readiness to learn, the special needs of Latino and English Language Learners (ELLs), indicators of Latino student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, college and career preparedness, school experience, and post-secondary experience.

Although research (Behnke et al., 2010; Chun & Dickson, 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Orfield & Lee 2007; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Simon et al., 2011; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) described the factors that may result in below-average high school graduation rates for Latinos, in 2011, the college enrollment for Latino students actually increased (Fry & Lopez, 2012). About 46% of Latino students who obtained a diploma or the equivalent to a diploma were enrolled in college (Fry & Lopez, 2012). The most recent data from 2010 provides evidence that the number of Latinos enrolled in college has reached its

highest rate of 32%, in contrast to the Black enrollment rate of 38%, the White enrollment rate of 43%, and the Asian-American enrollment rate of 62% (Fry, 2011). This research further indicated that in 2008, 1.3 million students enrolled in college, and in 2011, the number increased to 2.1 million. As a result, Latinos now make up 16.5% of the nation's 18- to 24-year old college students (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

It is alarming that the Latino population is growing at a rapid rate and has remained the lowest achieving group in education for the past four decades (Ortiz et al. 2012). Failure to get an adequate education results in higher unemployment rates, lower wages, higher crime rates, and a greater need for public services (Chun & Dickson, 2011). Latino youth face many challenges, and they also engage in risky behaviors that can affect their health. They have a higher rate of attempted suicide, drug use, and higher teenage pregnancy than Black and White youth (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). About 9% of teenage Latino males are victims of violence (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Moreover, homicide is the leading cause of death for the Latino youth, and Latino gangs make up about 46% of all gangs in the United States (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Although these statistics would appear to project a dismal future for the Hispanic community, there are many Hispanic youths who thrive despite their poverty, educational disparities, and emotional and environmental stressors. Therefore, to provide insight into ways to influence the success of Hispanic youth, this study examines the factors that Hispanic youths who do graduate from high school and enter a post-secondary institution identify as influencing their success.

Theoretical Rationale

Ecological systems theory, resilience theory, and growth mindset theory are prominent in discussing human development, and they provide theoretical evidence to explain Latino students' successful completion of secondary school and the successful navigation of their lives. A child's development can be influenced in many ways and by many sources (Killian, 2004). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Rutter's (1987) resilience theory, and Dweck's mindset theory (2006) provide a robust understanding of the role of the environment in determining human development. These theories offer insight into ways that environment influences students' success as measured by their grades, school behavior, and graduation.

Ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development, also known as the ecological systems theory, emerged from developmental and social psychology, and the major role that environmental factors play in human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner identified two major influences on his work: Vygotsky and Kurt Lewin. Vygotsky's social theory focused on how social interaction plays a major role in cognition and precedes development (Vygotsky, 1962). Kurt Lewin's dynamic theory of personality focused on daily lives and how individuals were seen to behave differently according to the dynamic tensions that were created between perceptions of self and the environment (Lewin, 1997). Building on Vygotsky's insights on social interaction and Lewin's development of the environmental influences on behavior, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory described five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem is the system in which the student lives, the

immediate environment of family, peer group, neighborhood, school, church, and work (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The microsystem explores the activities, roles, and interactions of the student and the student's immediate environment and its direct impact on the child's development including: family, school, religious institutions, neighborhood, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), for example, the interactions that develop between a child and parent or teacher. As evidence of the ecological theoretical construct, Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, and Bamaca (2006) studied the role of family members and teachers on student academic motivation. They found that the immediate environment had an impact on Latino students' academic motivation, such as mothers influencing their daughter's academic motivation and fathers having a stronger influence on their male children.

The mesosystem comprises interactions between the immediate environment and the student, that is, a student's home and school, parental involvement, child and community member (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner described the exosystem as being a system of institutions that the student does not directly interact with, such as external environment settings, which indirectly affect development, that is, parent's workplace, government, and media. The macrosystem involves the larger cultural context, Eastern vs. Western culture, national economy, political culture, and other behavior patterns of the world surrounding the student (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ortiz et al. (2012) emphasized that the exosystems and macrosystems contribute to educational advantages and disadvantages among Hispanics who live in high-poverty environments and attend urban schools.

Chronosystem refers to how people and environments change in the course of life, for example, political and economic changes, family structure, employment, place of residence (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). As an example of the powerful historical influences the macrosystem has on families, Bronfenbrenner suggested that families respond differently to various stressors in society. All the ecological systems, together, represent networks that reflect an individual's ecology, which changes as individuals become older (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's theory alludes to the way in which parental involvement, achievement in school, and personal characteristics may converge and impact one's development. A predictor of students' development and success could be their environment. If a student is at risk in an urban school setting, a positive school culture and a connection to the school can help a student succeed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Resilience theory. Resilience theory is defined as, "A dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar et al., 2000). In addition, Richardson (2002) further defined resilience theory as, "the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that result in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities of protective factors" (p. 309). Resilient individuals have specific protective mechanisms that are character traits an individual possesses, which emerge as effective responses when faced with adverse conditions such as poverty, dysfunctional family, and a failing school. Rutter (1987) suggested that protective mechanisms may drive individuals to overcome the odds when they face adversity by reducing risk impact, diminishing the negative chain reaction to risk factors, demonstrating resiliency traits, and focusing on opportunities for success.

This theory can be associated with Erikson's (1959) theory of psychological stages where an individual develops through life stages, each stage building on the other (Osborne, 2007). In addition, it can also be linked to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as resilience is influenced by one's environmental surroundings (Killan, 2004).

Resiliency theory provides insight into understanding Latino students who, despite their surroundings, were able to overcome adversity and graduate from an urban school to then enter to a post-secondary institution. However, some suggest that the resilience theory is limited and restricted to populations facing adversity, experiencing trauma, or a high level of stress (Osborne, 2007). Osborne further reported that the theoretical constructs may be, "misapplied in research or practice to normative life cycle issues or moderately stressful events" (Osborn, 2007). Nonetheless, Osborn supported that the original empirical basis of resilience theory is restricted to populations experiencing adversity, trauma, and high stress levels.

Dweck's mindset. Dweck's (2006) mindset model represents a more recent theoretical framework that provides additional evidence of the influence of the environment and critical interactions on student achievement and success. Through Dweck's (2006) research she found that the view or mindset people adopt for themselves affects the way they lead their life. She further explained how the influence of an individual can be divided into two mindsets—the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. The people with the fixed mindset believe that they were born with their intelligence and skills; furthermore, that their qualities are fixed and immutable (Dweck, 2006). She further explained that people with a fixed mindset go through life avoiding challenges because they find failure as a setback because they have to prove themselves and are

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concerned with how they are judged by others. When the people with a fixed mindset are not coping with failure, they feel smart, talented, and self-validated (Dweck, 2006). People with the growth mindset, on the other hand, view challenges and failure as an opportunity to improve and learn (Dweck, 2006). Dweck described the growth mindset as, "The belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (p. 7), and she explained that through this mindset, one changes and grows through his or her experience.

Dweck (2006) demonstrated through a number of research studies that the children with a growth mindset produced perseverance and resilience that helped, "convert life's setbacks into future successes" (p. 11). Students with a growth mindset face challenges, deal with them, and learn from them (Dweck, 2006). This supports an understanding of how Latino students can face adversity and thrive in an urban high school to then continue their education at a post-secondary school. While children with the fixed mindset are focused on succeeding by making no mistakes and they fail when faced with challenges, children with growth mindsets stretch themselves when confronted with challenges (Dweck, 2006).

Bronfennbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Rutter's (1987) resiliency theory, and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory provide a framework for this research study of factors that Latino students identify as influencing their graduation from an urban high school and their enrollment into a post-secondary institution. The ecological theory (1979) emphasizes how one's environment and the role of family and teachers can influence a Latino student to succeed. In addition, resilience theory can further help with understanding what characteristic traits, along with environmental influences; can guide

Hispanic students to succeed—even though they faced significant obstacles to success (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Dweck's (2006) mindset theory examines the variation in achievement of an individual, and how it can directly relate to the influence of expectations of teachers, along with other adults, on a student's motivation to engage in an effortful persistence and willingness to assume challenging tasks that lead to academic success in pursuit of higher educational goals.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors and influences that contribute to Latino students' graduation from an urban high school, as identified by Latino high school seniors who are enrolling in post-secondary institutions. This study intends to discover the challenges, such as academic, social, personal, family, and environmental, that students faced during their high school years, and what influences led to their high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary institutions. In order to identify these factors that Latino students identify as leading to the completion of an urban high school, this study utilizes in-depth interviews and self-reports of Latino students as a resource for understanding their success. The study uses qualitative research techniques applied by researchers, such as Douglas (2002) and Ortiz (2009), to discover through intensive interviews the narrative themes and artifacts that are revealed by interview respondents who are currently seniors in an urban high school and on the path to graduation and enrollment into a secondary institution.

Research Questions

This research study seeks to address three questions:

1. What are the challenges that a sample of Latino students, who are currently seniors in one urban high school and preparing to graduate and enroll in post-secondary institution, indicate that they have faced during their high school career?

2. What are the influences that Latino students identify as motivating their successful graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in a post-secondary institution?

3. What strategies do Latino students report as effective in overcoming the challenges they face in successfully completing high school?

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the ongoing research and literature of the Latino population, specifically high school students. It identifies the problems Latino students face academically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. In addition, it identifies the resilience and growth mindset of the Latino students in an urban school who have overcome adversity and succeeded in graduating. The study provides a full understanding of support systems or programs that are recommended to assist Hispanic students in overcoming the adversities they identify as their experience in an urban school and in preparing the students for college and career. Thus, the study has the potential to influence policy and decisions, as educational leaders wrestle with the needs of a growing population that impacts our economic and social future. Moreover, the results of this study may persuade those, who are reluctant to exercise leadership in this

area, that the policies that enhance the future prospects of the Latino population will have an impact on America's stature and economic fate in a changing world.

Definitions of Terms

Adversity – conditions and situations marked by misfortune.

Ecology – relationship between an individual and their environment.

External Protective Factors – characteristics of families, school, and community that foster resilience (Richardson, 2002).

Internal Protective Factors – characteristics of an individual that drive resilience, for example, self-esteem and motivation (Richardson, 2002).

Hispanics/Latino – terms used interchangeably in the United States to categorize Americans of Spanish-speaking countries (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012). The research uses the words Hispanics and Latino interchangeably. Hispanic refers to people of Spanish-speaking countries, comprising Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominican, and Central and South Americans (Ortiz et al., 2012). However, Latino most often refers to people of Latin American origin, also including Brazilians, and the term is more tied to national origin and not language, which includes Brazilians. The term Hispanic in the 1970s was the term used by the government to identify people of Spanish origin, though some argue that this term Hispanic dates back to pre-Mexican independence days (Vazquez & Krodel, 1989). In a national, bilingual-survey study conducted in 2011 by the Pew Hispanic Center of 1,220 Hispanic adults, about half claim that they identify themselves by their family's country of origin, that is, Dominican, Mexican, etc., and only 25% identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino (Taylor et al., 2012). In addition the study revealed that about 50% of the people did not have a

preference for either term; however, those that did have a preference favored Hispanic by 33% versus Latino by 14%. There has been some controversy over which term should be used. Some Hispanics believe that the term Hispanic is associated with the Spanish conquest or the U.S. government so, therefore, the term is offensive; whereas others believe the term Latino is a term used for foreigners (Retta & Bank, 2007). American-born and educated Hispanics primarily use the term Hispanic, and the term Latino is more likely to be used by first- or second-generation Latinos (Retta & Bank, 2007). Sometimes the terms are used differently based on the region of the U.S., for example, New York and California use the term Latino, while Texas and Arizona use the pan-ethic term Hispanic.

Mindset – a person's view that is adopted and affects their way of life by either a fixed or growth mindset (Dweck, 2006).

Protective Factors/Mechanisms – characteristics within a person that drive an individual to overcome the odds when faced with adversity (Richardson, 2002).

Resilience – power to overcome challenges and barriers, real and perceived, and recover from that adversity.

Resilient Individual – a person who copes with adversity and possesses protective mechanisms, when faced with adverse conditions, such as poverty, dysfunctional family, and a failing school (Richardson, 2002).

Urban School – schools that are located in large cities or towns and are most-frequently in poor neighborhoods. The conditions of urban schools include limited resources, less qualified teachers, and fewer educational program options. These socio-

cultural factors have been identified as contributing to poor academic performance and disruption of high school academic success (Chun& Dickson, 2011).

Urban/Suburban Districts – "All districts at or above the 70th percentile (1.1835) of students who have free or reduced lunch, that have: at least 100 students per square mile; or an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile" (NYS Education Department, 2012).

Chapter Summary

Data indicate that despite the fact that Latino high school students graduate at lower rates, drop out of high school at higher rates than other groups, and demonstrate lower literacy and college preparedness rates, there are a significant number of Latino students who do succeed in meeting their educational goals. Ecological systems theory (Bronfennbrenner, 1979), resiliency theory (Rutter, 1987), and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory provide a model for understanding and exploring the human development factors that influence students to persist despite adversity. This study examines the factors and influences that contribute to a sample of nine Hispanic students graduating from an urban high school and enrolling in a post-secondary institution through the themes and patterns that emerge from in-depth interviews.

Chapter 2 provides the rationale for investigating the research questions; establishes the structure for reviewing the relevant literature; and reviews a broad base of literature including dissertations, theses, peer-reviewed articles, and books. Chapter 3 outlines the research context and specifies the research participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents and offers analysis of the narrative data collected from the study's participants, and Chapter 5 offers an in-depth

discussion on the findings; specifies the implications of the findings; delineates the

study's limitations; and concludes with recommendations for policy, practice, education,

and leadership.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The review of literature examines the research that contributes to our current understanding of the educational status of Latino youth, influences on their achievement, and theoretical models that explain their development. Latino high school students face many challenges as they pursue graduation and enrollment in post-secondary education. Over 50% of Latino students attend an urban school that is located in neighborhoods that have high poverty, crime, and welfare-dependency rates (Simon et al., 2011). The students who attend these schools experience rates of educational failure that differ significantly from students who attend suburban or rural schools (Simon et al, 2011). Out of 17,500 public high schools in the nation, about 4,432 public high schools educate over 85% of all Latino public high school students (Fry, 2005). Many of these schools are concentrated in specific geographic locations where most Latinos reside: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, Illinois, and New Jersey.

The urban schools are usually large, serving over 1,838 students and comprise 10% of the American public schools, yet represent more than 67% of the students who receive a free lunch through the National School Lunch Act (Fry, 2005). Urban schools also have limited resources, fewer qualified teachers, and fewer educational program options (Chun & Dickson, 2011). In addition, Chun and Dickson (2011) suggested that gaps between home and school, differences in language, values, and expectations are also socio-cultural factors that have contribute to poor academic performance. In fact, Fry

(2005) reported statistics showing students in large high schools are learning less and are more likely to drop out before graduation. Latino high school dropout rates are four times higher than the dropout rates of their White counterparts (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

It is instructive, however, to observe that in two decades, between 1990 and 2010, the Hispanic dropout rate decreased from 32% to 14%, while Latino students continue to lag behind the Black (7%) and White (5%) dropout rates (NCES, 2012). In 2009, 59% of Latino high school students enrolled in college, a figure representing less than 20% of White high school student enrollment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Nonetheless, in 2011 there was an increase in the 18-24-year-old college enrollment, and the Latino population accounted for the majority of the increase (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Between 2010 and 2011, the number of Hispanics enrolled in college grew by 15% (Fry & Lopez, 2012). In fact, for the first time in 2011, Hispanics made up 25% of all 18-24-year-old students in two-year colleges and 13% enrollment in four-year colleges (Fry & Lopez, 2012). As Fry and Lopez (2012) emphasize, "This is a significant milestone for Hispanics because for the first time Hispanic representation among the nation's traditional college student population matched Hispanics' overall population representation at 16.5%" (p. 2).

It is important for Latino students to complete their high school education and receive improved preparation for post-secondary admission in order to increase the number of Latinos obtaining a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2011). Although there is an increase in the college enrollment of Hispanics, only 13% of Hispanics attained a bachelor's degree in 2010, compared to 39% of Caucasians (Fry, 2011). It is critical that Hispanics acquire an education to provide a pathway to financial stability and economic success (Gandara, Civil Rights Project, & University of California, 2008). In 2010, the

poverty rate among the Latino population was 26.6%, the median income of a Latino household was $37,759, and 30.7% of Latinos did not have health insurance (U.S. Census, 2011). These statistics can be attributed to the high dropout rates and lack of secondary or post-secondary education, leaving Hispanics with the requisite high unemployment rates and low-paying jobs. Clearly, the demographic data indicate that it is necessary to promote rigorous academic course work from an early age and to develop prevention dropout programs to improve the quality of education amongst Hispanics who are the fastest growing population in the U.S. (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

Despite their socio-cultural, socio-economic, and educational challenges, there are protective factors that have influenced some Latino students to graduate from urban schools and enter post-secondary institutions. This study examines those factors through the narratives related by successful Latino students. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), resilience theory (Rutter, 1987), and Dweck's mindset theory (2006) complement each other as they provide a framework to analyze the human behavior behind the persistence of some Latino students.

Review of Literature

Latino background/culture. Latinos have a diverse background that has emerged from interrelationships between the native Indians, the Spanish, Europeans, Africans, and also Asian populations (Vazquez & Krodel, 1989). Vazquez and Krodel (1989) claimed that in Mexico, and in parts of Central and South America, the combination of the races and ethnicities are predominantly Spanish and Indian with less influence from Africa. In Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, the combination that comprises the Latino race is predominantly Spanish and African, with less influence

from the native Indian groups. Latinos possess many cultural similarities, such as language, religion, and Spanish ancestry; however, Vazquez and Krodel (1989) argued that Latinos are not a homogenous group. In a nationwide survey of Latino adults conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, about 70% of the respondents claim that more than 50 million Latinos have many different cultures rather than a common culture; however, respondents expressed a strong connection to the Spanish language (Taylor et al., 2012). Vazquez and Krodel (1989) added that the Latino culture comes from various countries, with different histories and ethnicities. There are many cultural and behavioral differences in the Latino culture, which are reflected in multiple accents, dialects, music, food, clothing, and values (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). However, Moreno and Gaytan (2013) discussed similar characteristics and attributes found in the Latino culture, such as family loyalty, and attitudes toward education, hard work, and the importance of religion.

Latino demographics. There are approximately 52 million Latinos in the United States, which is about 17% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the National Council of La Raza (2008), the Latino population grew by almost 43% between 2000 and 2011. Nearly a quarter of the nation's births in 2012 were to Latino women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Latino population is also the youngest population in the country with a median age of 27 years old (U.S. Census, 2010). In the U.S., the Mexican population accounts for almost 65% of the Latino population; the second largest population is Puerto Rican, at 9% (not including the 3.7 million residents in Puerto Rico); Cubans and Dominicans each represent about 4%; Central American countries make up about 8%; and South American countries make up about 5% of the U.S. population (Hispanic Population – U. S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Latinos, including undocumented immigrants, have established themselves in states that have not traditionally been homes to the Latino community, resulting in demographic changes across the country and bringing new educational challenges not only to urban areas, but also to rural areas (Wortham, Roy, Link, & Martinez, 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reported that about 75% of the Latino population resides in eight states: California (28%), Texas (19%), Florida (8%), New York (7%), Illinois (4%), Arizona (4%), New Jersey (3%), and Colorado (2%). About 41% of the Puerto Rican population resides in New York and Florida; 68% of Cubans reside in Florida; and more than 50% of Dominicans reside in New York. There has been substantial growth in the Latino population living in other states, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and South Dakota, which more than doubled between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Changes and growth surges in industries, such as agriculture, construction, landscaping, manufacturing, and meat processing, are driving Latinos to new areas where the Latino population was not formerly present (Wortham et al., 2013). Further confirming data indicate that areas, such as Georgia, South Dakota, Mississippi, Wisconsin, Pennsylvanian, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina, have seen a growth in the Hispanic population (Wortham et al. 2013). In the New Latino Diaspora (NLD), in places that have not traditionally been home to Hispanics, schools are usually not prepared to support English Language Learners (ELLs), and they must manage ways to support this new population (Wortham et al., 2013). With such alarming numbers in the increase of the Hispanic population, it is important to focus on educating the Hispanic community to become productive citizens in American society.

Undocumented immigrants. In 2010, there were an estimated 11.9 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. About 80% of undocumented immigrants are Latino, 60% of who are estimated to be from Mexico (Becerra, Androff, Ayon, & Castillo, 2012). Many of these immigrants escape poverty in their native countries and come to the U.S. to seek economic growth where they can find low-wage employment (Becerra et al., 2012).

There are many taxpayers and politicians who argue that undocumented immigrants have become a social and financial burden to the U.S. They suggest that undocumented immigrants are costing taxpayers billions of dollars in law enforcement, health services, social services, and education (Becerra et al., 2012). In addition, Becerra et al. (2012) reported that this belief about the economic impact of undocumented immigrants has led to public policies, such as Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance (2006), and other recommended legislation prepared by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, and the Center for Immigration Studies. These policies have been enforced in several states to discourage hiring and renting to illegal immigrants in order to decrease the population of undocumented immigrants. Contrary to popular opinion or conventional wisdom, research shows that the rate of incarcerated, undocumented immigrants is lower than native-born citizens, and it is estimated that the cost to state and local governments for incarceration is less than 5% of the funds allocated to state/local law enforcement (Butcher & Piehl, 2007).

The majority of undocumented immigrants do not have health insurance because they are not eligible for government programs and employer insurance (Goldman, Smith, & Sood, 2006). Often, undocumented immigrants go to the emergency room where

hospitals are mandated to provide healthcare despite their immigration and financial status (Becerra et al., 2012). As a result, it is projected that providing emergency health care costs $6-$10 billion a year (Goldman et al., 2006). The federal government has created policies, such as the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, that provide millions of dollars annually to reimburse hospitals to care for those without health care (Becerra et al., 2012). Although emergency rooms do spend significant funds caring for undocumented immigrants, they continue to have lower rates of health care, and these expenditures account for only 1.5% of U.S. medical costs (Goldman et al., 2006).

Many children of undocumented parents are U.S. citizens. There are an estimated 5.5 million children with undocumented parents, and about 70% of these children are U.S. citizens (Chaudry, Capps, Pedroza, Castaneda, Santors, & Scott, 2010). The Supreme Court decision in 1982 of Plyer vs. Doe, guaranteed that undocumented students have the right to be educated in the nation's public school in grades K-12 (Chaundry et al., 2010). Although many people argue that educating undocumented immigrant students is costly, only about 3.3% of funds are used to educate them—out of the $530 billion spent to educate the total number of U.S. children (National Education Association, 2010).

In fact, although taxpayers and politicians argue that undocumented immigrants have become a social and financial burden to the U.S., the National Council of La Raza (NCLR, 2008), further reports that undocumented immigrants contribute more money in taxes than they consume in services through the use of Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers or false Social Security numbers. Undocumented immigrants are unable to receive government services (Barcerra et al., 2010). Consequently, undocumented

immigrants contribute over $7 billion annually to Social Security and over $1.5 billion to Medicare (NCLR, 2008). Undocumented immigrants also provide revenue to state and local governments through their employment, purchases, and taxes (Becerra et al., 2012). Many states report that undocumented immigrants contribute more than they consume in state and local taxes. For example, undocumented immigrants in Texas provided $17.7 billion in gross state product (Becerra et al., 2012).

Indeed, significant costs have been incurred through policies based on presumption rather than on fact. Many anti-immigration policies, such as the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Secure Border Initiative (2005), and the Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance (2006) were created to fight against undocumented immigrants, because the creators of these acts and initiatives believe that immigrants cost taxpayers billions of dollars; however, these organizations have become costly and ineffective (Becerra et al., 2012). Becerra et al. (2012) added that policies, such as the Deficit Reduction Act, which requires individuals to provide proof of citizenship in person when applying for Medicaid, are costing millions of dollars to the states. The Secure Border Initiative, a multibillion-dollar project that will take years aiming to secure U.S. borders, is adding to the national financial crisis (Becerra et al., 2012). These policies have discriminated against immigrants, causing harm to those who fear that they will be separated from their family and deported (Becerra et al., 2012). Becerra et al. (2012) argued that social workers should advocate for undocumented immigrants to be treated fairly and assist in reforming labor policies as non-documented immigrants continue to make economic contributions to the U.S. economy.

"Migration is one of the most radical transitions and life changes an individual or family can endure" (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009, p. 150). Many immigrants and their children face challenges, such anxiety and fear of deportation, a sense of isolation, stressors in obtaining citizenship, trying to assimilate to a new environment, language barrier, and discrimination (Perez et al., 2009). Despite these stressors, there have been some studies that show the resilience of the undocumented students as they succeed in school. One study by Dozier (1993) identified three main emotional concerns that undocumented college students face: fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression; yet they managed to graduate from high school and go to college. In another study of 10 undocumented male Mexican college students, De Leon (2005) found that the participants experienced emotional challenges, yet they expressed a high level of optimism and were determined to persevere due to teachers' and counselors' guidance. A study of 10 high school college-ready undocumented seniors by Oliverez (2006) revealed that despite the obstacles faced as an undocumented citizen, they were determined to persevere and continue their education by attending college. Oliverez (2006) established four common themes of the undocumented participants: they were in the U.S. to access greater opportunity than they could have had in their native countries, their rights were extremely limited, their families' modest finances meant living in poverty, and guidance from individuals outside of their homes would be required in order to get to college. Oliverez (2006) found that their reality was their motivation to succeed.

Approximately 80,000 undocumented students graduate from high school, and only about 13,000 enroll in public colleges or universities because they are not eligible for scholarships or financial federal assistance (Perez et al., 2009). Although life in the

U.S. for the undocumented immigrants appears to be dismal and discouraging because they cannot obtain a driver's license, are forced to work in low-paying jobs, cannot get any federal assistance, and can be deported at any time, there are some programs that promote social justice on behalf of this population, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (Becerra et al., 2012). The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act (2001), not approved yet by Congress, would grant permanent residency to undocumented students who graduate from U.S. high schools, or who plan to go to a post-secondary institution or join the military service (Becerra et al., 2012).

Urban schools. Urban schools are located in areas that have 50,000 people or more with a high concentration of people of color and immigrants (Smith, 2011). More than 50% of Hispanics attend urban high schools that are usually located in poor neighborhoods, and are overcrowded and are characterized by high poverty and crime, welfare dependency rates, as well as educational failure (Simon et al., 2011). Lee (2005) affirmed that a student living in a high-poverty environment is more likely to lack health care, become a victim of crime, live in a single-parent household, become pregnant, and have a parent who has not graduated from high school and dropped out of school.

Orfield and Lee (2007) described urban schools as segregated schools that are becoming less White and have a higher population of poor children. These urban schools or segregated minority schools are, "inferior in terms of the quality of their teachers, the character of the curriculum, the level of competition, average test scores, and graduation rates" (Orfield & Lee, 2007, p. 5). Lee (2005) explained that urban schools face many challenges in hiring teachers, because the urban school district cannot meet the salaries and working conditions of suburban schools; as a result, urban school districts hire less-

qualified teachers who might lack certification and advanced degrees. Resources, such as books, materials, and technology, in urban schools become a major challenge because urban school districts spend less per pupil than suburban school districts (Lee, 2005). Often, schools are aging and facilities are inadequate for learning. Kozol (1991) described one urban school full of sewer water and doors locked with chains. He found another school with no working drinking fountains, sweltering heat in the summer and cold classrooms in the winter. Kozol stated that spending more per pupil can improve conditions in the crumbling infrastructure. These unsafe conditions continue to be evident in urban schools, which have become educational failures.

The urban schools have higher absenteeism, tardiness, disciplinary concerns, and dropout rates (Lee, 2005). In addition, Lee (2005) claimed that students in urban schools have lower academic achievement and lack of parental involvement. Smith (2011) discussed that an urban school is not conducive to teaching or learning if safety is a concern and if the physical appearance of the school is deteriorating. However, it is critical that urban students are provided with a rigorous education, and programs need to be implemented to help increase academic achievement. Smith (2011) suggested that implementing effective instructional programs, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and involving all stakeholders (parents, staff, and community) in the educational process, creating a shared vision and a safe environment would provide better opportunities for students. In addition, setting high expectations, meaningful instruction, regular meetings with stakeholders, and implementing an instructional character-education program for students would enhance a safe learning environment (Smith, 2011).

Achievement gap. The high school graduation rate in the United States is about 70%, which lags behind countries such as Denmark (96%), Japan (93%), Poland (92%), and Italy (79%) (Wagner, 2008). Wagner (2008) discussed that only about one-third of U.S. high school students graduate from high school and are ready for college and the percentage is much lower for poor minority students. In the U.S., 40% of students that enter college must take remedial courses (Wagner, 2008). According to Wagner (2008), students are graduating from both high school and college unprepared for the work force. As a result, the Common Core Learning Standards (2012) were created to provide students with a rigorous, high-quality education to prepare them for college and career readiness. American schools in 45 states have adopted these standards for all students to experience a quality education (CCLS, 2012).

As the Latino population grew in the United States, the growth of the Latino student population grew rapidly. Latino students enrolled in public schools doubled between 1994 and 2005 (Maxwell, 2012). It is estimated that by 2020, one in four children enrolled in K-12 public school will be Hispanic (Maxwell, 2012). Fry & Passel (2009) further estimated that more than half of the students enrolled in school will be second-generation Latino (people born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent), another third of the students will be at least third-generation Latino (people born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.), and the remainder will be immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. In order to meet President Obama's goal of making the United States the world leader by 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) projected that college graduates have to increase by 50% nationwide in 2020, making more than half of the Latinos of college age obtain a college degree (U.S. Department of

Education, 2011). Clearly the expanding Latino population will have a significant impact on the economy and culture of the United States as Maxwell (2012) argued: "If the United States is going to thrive and be a world leader in education, it must boost the educational attainment of its fastest growing population" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) suggested implementing educational reforms that make college accessible, improve college readiness, ensure academic excellence, and college completion. Given that Latino students who make it to college are less likely to earn a degree, 13% of Hispanics, compared to 39% of non-Hispanic Whites, have a bachelor's degree or higher, it is important to emphasize improving the educational achievement for Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Many Hispanic families rely on schools to help reverse the effects of poverty. About 25% of the Hispanic population lives at poverty level compared to 10% of Whites, and the median income for the Hispanic population in 2010 was about 38% compared to about 55% of Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Research among all ethnic groups has established that poverty leads to poor educational outcomes (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). As a result, the Hispanic student faces many economic challenges to educational attainment, which results in a higher risk of high school dropout rates, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, low college enrollment, and unemployment (Alfaro et al., 2006). According to U.S. Census Bureau (2010) 63% of Hispanics, in comparison to 87.6% Whites, have a high school diploma. For years, Latinos, along with African Americans and Native Americans have lagged far behind their White peers on most standardized tests (Noguera & Akom, 2000). Gregory et al. (2010) emphasized that discipline also

contributes to lagging achievement among these students. Low-income students who reside in crime-infested, high-poverty communities will be at greater risk for disciplinary concerns, causing an interruption in academics (Gregory et al., 2010). As a result of the low-quality education in segregated schools and discipline, the achievement gap remains a concern for the nation.

The achievement gap is evident in grades, standardized test scores, dropout rates, and college completion rates (Noguera & Akom, 2000). The government has been pressured, since the 1983 Reagan Administration's report, "A Nation at Risk," warning of dangerous deficiencies in American schools and demanding academic excellence (Orefield & Lee, 2007). Orefield and Lee (2007) further reported that since the 1983 report, Congress has established national goals for upgrading and equalizing education with Goals 2000 promising to equalize education for non-White students by the year 2000, and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) promising to close the achievement gap by 2013. Furthermore, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans was developed in 1990 to provide guidance in education, academic excellence, and opportunities (Maxwell, 2012). With all the incentives in government policies to close the achievement gap, Latinos continue to lag behind their White counterparts. Latinos fall short of their peers as early as kindergarten, because many Latino students do not attend preschool and start in kindergarten speaking little or no English (Maxwell, 2012). Maxwell (2012) asserted that in 8th grade, Latino students score more than 20 points lower than White peers in the math portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The achievement gap has resulted in Hispanic

students dropping out of high school about four times the rate of White students (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

As a result of high dropout rates, Hispanics have higher unemployment rates and lower-paying jobs (Ortiz et al., 2012). Low-income families have poor health care, poor nutrition, and fewer educational resources at home (Chun & Dickson, 2010). A study in 2008 by Behnke et al. (2010), surveyed 501 Hispanic students in grades 6-12 in North Carolina, and it investigated the reasons why their peers dropped out of school. The study revealed that 75% of the students believed it was personal problems (pregnancy, problems at home), 54% of students claimed that it was academic struggles, and about 50% said it was because they wanted to work to help their family financially. In addition, the study found that some other reasons that might trigger dropping out of school are peer pressure, language barrier (over 60% speak Spanish at home), and sense of not belonging (about 50% were in the country less than six years). The researchers suggested more Spanish-speaking staff, academic and personal support, and improved English as a Second Language classes would minimize the dropout rate.

A study protocol that was developed to identify the national data for educational attainment found the factors contributing to the dismal circumstances for the Hispanic student population included generational status, English proficiency, discrimination, and the influence of Latino microsystems (immediate and extended family). In this study, the high school dropout rate, graduation, and college enrollment for Hispanic, Black, and White populations were identified between 1975 and 2009 using the U.S. Census and the National Center for Educational Statistics (Ortiz et al., 2012). The national data indicated Hispanic high school dropout rates have surpassed Blacks and Whites for the past three

decades, which affects lower high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Ortiz et al., 2012). After 1990, Latinos enrolled in two-year institutions more frequently than Blacks, and fewer Latinos were enrolled in four-year institutions, compared to Black and White students (Ortiz et al., 2012). The study revealed that Hispanics were more likely to enroll in a two-year college as they continued their education (Ortiz et al., 2012). Ortiz et al. further reported that Cubans and the Puerto Ricans had the highest academic success in the Latino population. The increase of some Latinos graduating from high school and pursing higher education showed progress in the Hispanic community; however, Hispanics continue to lag behind their counterparts. Ortiz et al. (2012) suggested that in order to improve factors contributing to the low academic status of Hispanics, programs need to be developed to promote a connection between the Hispanic student and their families and the educational system from kindergarten through college.

Studies since the 1960s have shown that the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks continues to exist (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). There are many factors that contribute to the achievement gap: overcrowded schools, lack of resources, unsafe schools, uncertified teachers, and many others (National Education Association, 2010). A number of interventions, such as pre-K programs, smaller schools, improved teacher programs, and high standards have been implemented at the school, district, state, and national level to address the achievement gap; however, the gap persists (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). On average, Latinos perform far below most of their peers throughout their educational career (Gandara et al., 2008). Gandara et al. argued that the leading cause of the achievement gap is poverty. Hispanic children are twice as likely to be poorer than their White counterparts; as a result, these children lack nutrition and health

insurance, causing them to go to school with health problems that constitute major impediments to learning (Gandara et al., 2008). Despite the dropout rate of Hispanics decreasing, as indicated by evidence that in 2011 only 14% of Hispanic 16-24-year-olds were high school dropouts, which was half the percentage of 28% in 2000; and 69% of Hispanic high school graduates in 2012 enrolled in college in the fall (2% higher than their White counterparts), Hispanics continue to lag behind (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Gandara et al. (2008) suggested that district school-based strategies, such as professional development for teachers, providing home-environment learning, and supplemental learning opportunities for students, can help in narrowing the achievement gap.

Theoretical frameworks.

Ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory explained how the environment, immediate family, school, and community, impact a student's academic status and influence their behavior in general. "Family, peers, community, school, and culture all create pathways leading to both positive and negative educational outcomes among the Hispanic student population" (Woolley, 2009, p 10). Leonard (2011) described Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory as being complex layers of school, family, and community relationships as it focused on individual student development. Alfaro et al. (2006) and Chun & Dickson (2011) used the ecological systems theory to explore the role of family and teachers on student academic motivation and success. Alfaro et al. (2006) found that what impacted Hispanic student academic motivation and success was generational status, discrimination, gender, and teacher support. Alfaro et al. (2006) and Chun & Dickson (2011) focused on the mesosystem

(interactions between immediate environment and student) with parent involvement and cultural training for teachers to improve academic motivation and success.

Ortiz et al. (2012) argued that the exosystem (community level) and the macrosystem (public policies) contributed to the educational advantages and disadvantages of the Latino high-poverty, community urban schools. Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, positive-proximal parent involvement and culturally responsive teaching can influence students' academic performance by "increasing their academic self-efficacy and their sense of school belonging" (Chun & Dickson, 2011). Wooley (2009) further stated that building a connection between Latino students, their families, and the school, including resources, might improve graduation rates, and enrollment into a two-year and four-year college.

In the mixed methods case study of Dunbar High School, an urban high school in the Northeast, researchers examined the past 60 years of the school's failures and successes through the Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (Leonard, 2011). An historical survey of Dunbar High School revealed how aspects of one's environment control a student's academic growth. In the early 1960s, the graduation rate at Dunbar was the highest to date because of the integration of Black students with White students (Leonard, 2011). In the late 1960s, the reputation of the school declined because there was an overflow of low-income families, students with disabilities, and ELL students. Finally in the 1980s, the school recovered with an increase in promotion rates, and then when the U.S. economy collapsed in the late 1980s, Dunbar High School suffered program cuts, which resulted in the highest dropout rate in the school's history (Leonard, 2011). Further study of Dunbar High School from 1996 to 2003 showed

school-wide improvements in facilities, staffing, safety, standardized test scores, and graduation rates.

Researchers found that using ecological systems theory gave a clear understanding of the school-community collaboration that promoted student development as measured by variables such as graduation, attendance, and dropout rates (Leonard, 2011). Although the school partnerships resided in the exosystem (outside the daily school environment), they influenced students' development when the school partnership created a new microsystem setting for students to receive face-to-face services such as academic support, health services, and career opportunities (Leonard, 2011). Findings suggested that face-to-face services (microsystem) from the school partnership with businesses, along with the relationship between school, home, peers, and work (mesosystem), promoted student development. Thus, establishing the microsystem provided a foundation for direct relationships between students and their teachers, peers, and parents that could lead to academic success. This study exhibits the application of the ecological theoretical framework and how aspects of their environment control students' development.

As Bronfenbrenner's earlier theory in the 1970s focused on the ecological theory, he criticized himself for disregarding the role one plays in his or her own development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). He then became concerned with the processes of human development, which in the 1990s was known as proximal processes, the bio-ecological model. The proximal process is the connection between people and their environment, which was added to his model as the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This system referred to how the person and his or her environments change over time. He also placed

a greater emphasis on processes and the role of the biological person. The Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model has become the bio-ecological model, which includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. The interactions between these environmental influences form the basis for the theory.

Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfiel, and Karnki (2009) argued that scholars who based their work on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) were not identifying all the components of the theory. They stated that research based on Bronfenbrenner's theory should identify the ecological theory, the bio-ecological model, or the theory in its mature form, which considers both. Some authors identified their research based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, but frequently considered only part of the theory, which is considered to be unhelpful to the field. Tudge et al. (2009) researched 25 published articles that were based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Of the 25 studies, only four used the mature form of his theory. Tudge et al. (2009) noted that failure to identify parts of the theory or the mature theory resulted in misrepresentation of the theory**.**
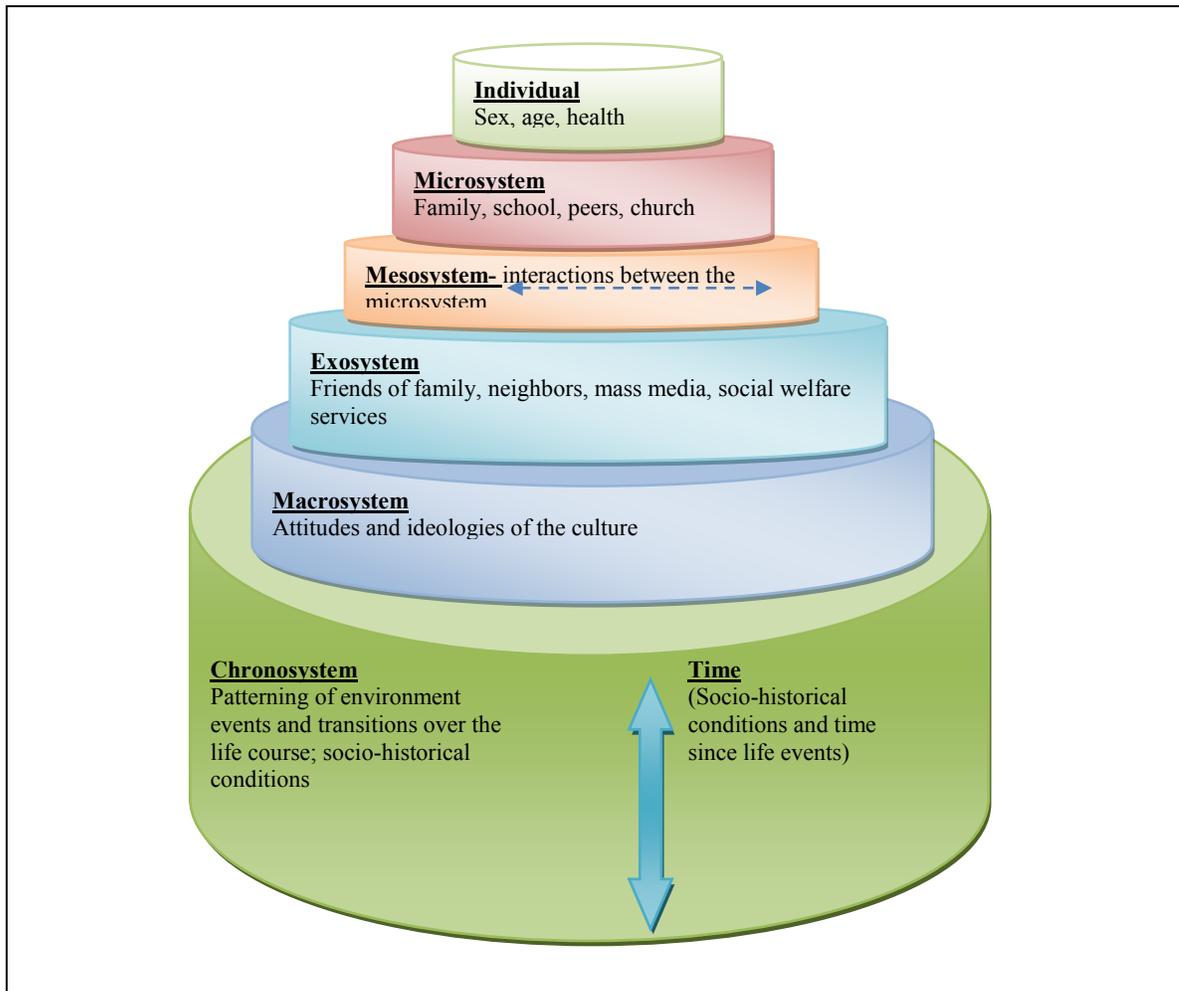
Figure 2.1. Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory. Adapted from "Ecological Systems Theory," by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1989, *Annals of Child Development, 6*, 187-249. Copyright 1989 by Williams & Wilkins.

Resilience theory*. Killian (2004) believed that the resilience theory was influenced and shaped by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, furthering Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework by arguing that specific environmental factors

develop a resilient individual. Luthar et al. (2000) agreed that the framework guiding

resilience is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. Luthar et al. (2000)

confirmed that a child's ecological system creates a dynamic relationship and influences

his or her development. Cicchetti and Lynch (1993) further added that the microsystem,

mesosytem, exosystem, and macrosystem in the ecological systems theory interact and

transact with each other in shaping a child's development. As a result, resilience and

protective factors work in the ecological systems to influence development (Killian,

2004). Killian (2004) added that environmental risk factors contribute to resilience, and

certain protective mechanisms create the foundation where resilience builds. Children

build these protective mechanisms by having good role models and access to social

support (Killian, 2004).

Resilience is the process of successful adaptation despite challenging or extremely

threatening circumstances (Killian, 2004). Sterling (2010) emphasized that resilient

learners develop resilient social-ecological systems during a time of threat, uncertainty,

and surprise. Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer (2003) described

resilience as a dynamic process that involves interaction of risk, vulnerability, and

protective factors over a long period of time, which modifies the effect of adverse life

events. Masten (2000) stated the resilience in children refers to positive outcomes in

spite of severe threats to their development. An individual becomes resilient because of

external and internal factors they possess, which are referred to as protective factors

(Lucero, 2011). These protective factors serve as a buffer to adversity, and the greater

these protective factors are, the more likely a person will persevere through life's

adversity. Resilience researchers for over 50 years have identified various individual

protective factors of children who expected to struggle, yet were associated with positive

outcomes (Luthar, 2006). In fact, studies show that 50% to 66% of children growing up

in an adverse environment appear to overcome the odds and possess resilience (Masten,

2001).

Studies report that children have varying degrees of resilience during different

aspects of their lives (Killian, 2004). Children are not always resilient in all situations.

Killian (2004) confirmed that a child might be resilient in one situation but not in another

situation. Luthar et al. (2000) affirmed that a child might cope successfully with specific

environmental stressors and, on the other hand, react negatively to other stressors during

another time. Thus, resilience has been described as "a characteristic that varies from

person to person and can grow or decline over time" (Higgins, 1994, p. 9). Higgins

(1994) emphasized that resilience is not simply an innate trait; it must be nurtured, and it

develops over a life span.

Killian (2004) argued that resilience has caused some confusion about whether it

is a positive outcome for children who experience adversity, or if it is a skill or capacity

to cope under certain stressors, an adaptive process of coping, or a set of personal and

environmental variables that focus on a specific developmental and environmental

circumstance. Models, such as the universal strengths model, the strengths model, and

the protective capacities model help refine the aspects of resilience (Killian, 2004). The

universal strengths model maintains that resilience is a universal human capacity that

enables a person, group, or community to deal with adversity by facing, overcoming, and

being transformed by the adversity. The strengths model focuses on individual, family,

and community strengths that help prepare an individual for difficulties and hardship.

Finally, the protective capacities model states that certain children, families, and communities have protective capacities that enable positive adaptation despite adversity.

Richardson (2002) also refined the resilience theory by identifying an analysis of resilience that occurs over three phases, each phase emerging from a question. The question that guided the first phase was: "What characteristics enable a person to overcome adversity?" The focus was to identify the resilient quality one possessed to thrive despite adversity (Richardson, 2002). The second phase was in response to the question: "How can an individual attain resilient characteristics?" Richardson (2002) emphasized that the question concentrated on the process an individual developed in coping with stressors, and how the individual acquired qualities that promote resilience. The third phase discussed the theory of innate resilience in every individual, which emerged from the question: "What and where is the motivational force within individuals that fosters resiliency?" (Richardson, 2002).

Project Competence was a 20-year study (intervening after 7, 10, and then 20 years) of competence and resilience that took place in Minneapolis with 205 children: 114 girls, 91 boys, and 27% minorities all attending urban city schools (Masten, 2000). Masten (2000) reported that the study gathered extensive information about the lives of the children, including competence, adversity faced, and environmental factors that influenced them. A major theme that emerged from this study was that the children who succeeded in the midst of adversity had an increase in internal and external resources. These resilient individuals were critical thinkers and problem solvers, were close to adults who nurtured them and guided them, followed rules and laws, were involved in activities from home to community, developed positive relationships, and finally, had a

strong sense of self-esteem (Masten, 2000). Contrary to the resilient child, children who were not resilient were faced with many challenges, and they did not have internal and external protective factors. They suffered from poor self-esteem and did not have close relationships with anyone (Masten, 2000). The study also found that life changes an individual after 20 years. Masten (2000) expressed that individuals might have a second chance in life and have opportunities to change. Some of the children, identified as non-resilient, made changes to guide them to become competent individuals in society (Masten, 2000).

Protective factors. As the Hispanic population grows, it is critical to identify what factors influence an individual to overcome adversity. Researchers have identified protective factors that drive an individual to develop resiliency. Lucero (2011) performed a quantitative study on the resiliency of Latino high school students, focusing on the impact of external and internal factors. She anticipated that the study would clearly give some support to strategies developed to raise the graduation rate of the Latino population. The study was conducted in a high school in Los Angeles, CA. There were approximately 100 Latino participants from grade 12 that were on some on track to graduate and others were not on a track to graduate. The instrument used to complete the quantitative study was The Healthy Kids Survey; Resilience and Youth Development Module, which focused on three external protective factors: caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation, and three internal protective factors: social competence, sense of self, and sense of purpose. Lucero's findings indicated that there were two major protective factors in students that were on track to graduate: the external factor of high expectations and the internal factor of sense of meaning and purpose.

There were no significant differences in the protective factors between academic resiliency and gender, household composition, language spoken, or parents' educational level. Lucero (2011) did find that participants born in another country were more likely to graduate than the Latinos born in the United States.

A three-year study of 35 talented freshman and sophomore students in an urban high school identified both risk factors (variables that increase negative outcomes) and protective factors (variables that promote positive outcomes) that guided the participants in high school (Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005). These students were financially disadvantaged, ethnically diverse, and academically talented students who either achieved or underachieved in their urban schools. The study showed that 18 high-achieving students developed resilience—despite their challenges, which included poverty, family issues, and school and community environment. Various protective factors, including belief in self, personal characteristics (independence, determination), a support system (family, teachers, honors classes), and participation in extracurricular activities, contributed to the development of resilience. On the other hand, the other participants who underachieved had developed fewer protective factors and had specific risk factors such as having siblings who dropped out of school. These resilient participants graduated from high school and continued their education in college.

Douglas (2002), in her phenomenological study of how successful African-American high school seniors speak about their experiences that helped them graduate from high school, identified three themes that emerged from her qualitative study: family environment; social environment, such as school and friends; and personal attributes or disposition. From these themes, Douglas (2002) identified the protective mechanisms/

factors in the lives of the participants such as: average intelligence, self-esteem, locus of control, perseverance, significant adult, racial awareness, engaging personalities, involvement in church, efficacy, and positive school experience. These protective factors guided the participants to their success in graduating from high school.

    Dweck's mindset theory. Dweck (2006) described one's mindset as a powerful belief that one can change. She realized through her research that "the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life" (p. 6). Dweck focused on how people cope with failure, and she was able to identify through her research the growth mindset that could turn failure into a gift and the fixed mindset that cannot deal with failure. Dweck recognized the growth mindset when she studied how children cope with difficulty by giving them a hard puzzle to figure out. She was surprised to see the children exhibiting intellectual skills by putting forth the effort and thriving when faced with the challenge of figuring out a difficult puzzle. In fact, she thought that human qualities were carved in stone, which is the fixed mindset, either you're smart or when you failed, you are not smart. The children with the fixed mindset were not as eager to face the challenge; they felt like a failure when they were not able to succeed.

    Dweck (2006) asked children and young adults with fixed mindsets and growth mindsets, "When do you feel smart?" The people with the fixed mindset appeared to be flawless with responses like, "when I don't make mistakes," "when I finish something fast and it's perfect," and "when something is easy for me, but other people can't do it" (Dweck, 2006, p. 24). The people with the growth mindset were eager to confront a challenge and learn, using responses such as, "when it's really hard and I try, I work on something a long time and I start to figure it out" (Dweck, 2006, p. 24). People with the

fixed mindset need immediate success and those with the growth mindset know that success takes time. Consequently, the growth mindset allows people to identify their deficiencies and show effort by trying, while the fixed mindset has difficulty recognizing deficiency.

In a two-year study of students transitioning to junior high school, Dweck (2006) identified the difference between students with fixed and growth mindsets. Students in junior high school faced many challenges because the work becomes more rigorous, instruction is less personalized, and students are more independent (Dweck, 2006). The study showed students with a fixed mindset declined in their grades during the two years in junior high school, and those with a growth mindset presented an increase in their grades. During interviews, the students with the fixed mindset blamed a teacher or a class subject they disliked for their poor grades; however, the students with the growth mindset had faced challenges also, put effort into facing the challenges. Some students with the fixed mindset revealed that because they were already smart, their main goal in school was to exert little effort, and for students with the growth mindset, it was a time for them to learn (Dweck, 2006).

Dweck (2006) revealed through research studies that adult expectations of student performance can convey a variety of reactions. When one praises a child for their intelligence, "you are a genius," it can have an adverse effect because the student develops a fixed mindset. The fixed mindset can lead to diminished effort and laziness in their work, causing them to be less innovative (Dweck, 2006). However, Dweck urges adults to praise children for their effort and persistence, for example, "your project turned out well," leading them to work harder. Through her research, evidence showed that

students who thrive are those who work hard, not the ones with the perfect scores. This

theory demonstrates that education could improve student learning by encouraging them

to think about their skills as a learning process rather than what skills were innate.

Dweck's Mindset Theory		
Fixed Mindset		**Growth Mindset**
Avoid	**Challenges**	Embrace
Give up easily	**Obstacles**	Persistent
Seeing it as fruitless or worse	**Effort**	Seeing it the path to mastery
Ignore useful negative feedback	**Criticism**	Learn from criticism
Feeling threatened	**Success of others**	Find lessons inspiration
They may mature early and achieve less than their full potential		They reach higher levels of achievements

Figure 2.2. Dweck's Mindset Theory. Adapted from "Mindset: The New Psychology of

Success," by C. Dweck. Copyright 2006 by Random House.

Chapter Summary

The Latino population is the fastest growing minority population in the United

States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is important to set high standards in education as

the quality and attainment of education experienced by Latino population will impact the

economic and social well-being of the nation's future (Alliance for Excellent Education,

2009). Therefore, it is crucial to focus on educating Hispanic high school students to

decrease the dropout rate and assist in leading students to seek further education and

succeed in attaining economic stability. The educational system has influenced the educational progress of Latino students, resulting in poor economic and social outcomes. Several factors have been identified as contributing to student failure in high school including racial stereotyping, low expectations, and lack of extracurricular activities (Alfaro et al., 2006).

The ecological systems theory, resiliency theory, and mindset theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rutter, 1987; Dweck, 2006) offer models for understanding the persistence of Hispanic students graduating from an urban high school to further study in a post-secondary institution. While 15% of Hispanic students do not graduate from high school, others manage to succeed. While many researchers can speak of the problems with schools, few highlight the successes (Conchas, 2006). Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) encouraged researchers to reframe their research questions to disclose positive aspects of high schools and move beyond school failure to understanding success. This research provides the factors that Hispanic students identify as influencing their graduation from an urban school and their entrance into a post-secondary institution. The factors shape the recommendations for high school programs that support Hispanic students to promote academic resilience and success.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

This study examines the perspective of Latino high school seniors to discover, through in-depth interviews, the factors they identify as influencing their graduation from an urban high school and their decision to enter a post-secondary institution. With the analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) estimating that Latinos will account for about one in every four of the over 400 million Americans by the year 2050, making the Hispanic population the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, significantly impacting the nation's culture and economy, the education of Latinos has become a critical social policy issue. In the 1993-94 school year, about 5 million Hispanic students were enrolled in America's public schools, and that number doubled by the 2005-06 school year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). This increase in public school enrollment by Latino students requires the implementation of higher standards in American public school education to ensure that these students succeed in graduating from high school, prepared for college and a career: ultimately, the educational status of the burgeoning Latino population will impact the economic and social well-being of the nation's future (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). However, statistics show that there is an extensive achievement gap between Hispanic students and their White counterparts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Hispanic high school students have low graduation, literacy, and college-preparedness rates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). More than 50% of

Hispanics attend an urban public high school (Simon et al., 2011). Urban schools are in neighborhoods that have high poverty, crime, welfare dependency, and educational failure rates (Simon et al., 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012), the high school graduation rate for Hispanics in 2010 was 63%, compared to the graduation rate of Black students at 84%, and the graduation rate of their White counterparts at 87.6%. The overall dropout rate declined for all high school students from 12% in 1990 to 7% in 2010; between those periods, the Hispanic dropout rate decreased from 32% to 14% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although the dropout rate decreased, Hispanics continue to lag behind the Black dropout rate at 7% and White dropout rate at 5%. During this time, White students also surpassed Hispanics and Blacks in the percentage of students who enroll in college (Ortiz et al., 2012). In 2009, 59% of Hispanic high school students enrolled in college, which is 20% lower than the enrollment of White high school students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). However in 2011, there was an increase in 18-24-year-old college enrollment, and the Hispanic population accounted for the majority of the increase (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

Despite the challenges they face, many Hispanic students have succeeded in overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals. This study documents the factors that propel Hispanic students to successfully graduate from an urban high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. Researchers Ortiz et al., (2012), Perez et al. (2009), and Reyes & Elias (2011) examined and provided evidence suggesting that specific characteristics of Hispanic personality traits, cultural beliefs, and other environmental factors impact the experience of Hispanic students as they pursue graduation from an urban high school to further their education. To further the understanding of the factors

that influence educational success of Hispanic students, ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), resilience theory (Rutter, 1987), and Dweck's mindset theory (2006) offer frameworks for analyzing the persistence of Hispanic students who graduate from an urban high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. While 15% of Hispanic students do not graduate from high school, others manage to succeed (Ortiz et al., 2012). This study focuses on the challenges and motivating factors that participants perceive and describe as influencing their successful completion of high school.

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the challenges that a sample of Latino students, who are currently seniors in one urban high school and preparing to graduate and enroll in a post-secondary institution, indicate that they have faced during their high school career?

2. What are the influences that Latino students identify as motivating their successful graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in a post-secondary institution?

3. What strategies do Latino students report as effective in overcoming the challenges they face in successfully completing high school?

The research seeks to discover, through a qualitative study, the challenges Latino students encounter in an urban high school, and it identifies the influences that led to their graduation and enrollment in a post-secondary school. This study uses inductive in-depth interviews with Latino high school seniors as a method for collecting data to investigate and develop an understanding of the factors leading to their graduation from an urban high school as well as the major barriers they had to overcome. The researcher seeks to

illuminate and understand the personal experiences of the Latino students to learn about the culture, experiences, and the plight of the Latino students.

Researchers Creswell (2013) and Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argued that the qualitative perspective is a valid and deeper way to gain insight into the human experience. In addition, qualitative research has great potential to transform the world by empowering the participants to share their stories, hear their voices, and try to make a change by contributing to the literature (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach the researcher used is the phenomenological research design that Creswell (2013) described as the, "common meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 76) and claimed that, "phenomenologists focus on what all the participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p.76). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) further described phenomenology as a, "term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (p. 26). In analyzing the response of the interviewees, the researcher sought to understand the way Hispanic students describe their quest to complete high school and enroll in a post-secondary school. The researcher discovered narrative themes and artifacts that were revealed by interview respondents through intensive interviews.

Research Context

This study took place in a high-poverty, urban community in a suburb outside of New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The community has a population of 67,300. Approximately 63% of the population is Black, 28% is White, and 14% is Latino (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), the median

household income is about $50,122, and about 15% of the population lives below poverty

level. The community is estimated to have about 32.7% foreign-born residents and about

23% of the population speaks another language other than English at home. The

Hispanic population in the community, along with other Caribbean populations,

continues to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The school district is categorized by the New York State Education Department

(2012) as a "high need/low resource capacity urban-suburban school district," which

serves approximately 8,182 students: 11 elementary schools, two middle schools, two

high schools, and one alternative high school (NYS District Report Card, 2012- 2013).

The high school where the study took place has a student enrollment of 1,313 students

with 79% Black, 16% Latino, 4% White, and 1% other (NYS District Report Card, 2012-

2013). The report shows that in this high school, 47% of the students receive free lunch,

5% reduced-price lunch, 4% are in enrolled in the English as a Second Language

Program, and 23% of the students are identified as students with disabilities. In addition,

68% of the students are economically disadvantaged (NYS District Report Card, 2012-

2013). The NYS District Report Card (2012- 2013) reported the overall graduation rate

within four years of the high school is 71%, and the Latino graduation rate is only 64%.

The researcher determined to complete the qualitative study in this urban-

suburban school district that is characterized with a low graduation rate of Hispanics.

The researcher's decision to study in this district was strengthened by access to a student

body that was located where the researcher is presently employed. The school is

designated as "urban" while existing in a suburb of New York City, which is due to its

diverse population and poverty rate, mirroring its neighboring city. The district

represents a microcosm of the city, and the district administration acknowledged that the

district could benefit from the study.

Research Participants

The research participants were Latino high school seniors who were in good

standing academically, eligible to graduate in June 2014, and who had applied and

decided to enter a post-secondary institution. The school counselors identified this

population of students, inquired as to their willingness to participate in a confidential

study, and provided a list of students who agreed to participate. There were not many

Hispanic males that fit the required characteristics for the study. Ten participants, five

males and five females, were selected to participate in the study.

An overview and purpose of the study was explained, verbally and written, to

each participant on why their participation was critical. The researcher explained that

their participation could guide other students through interventions and programs to lead

to academic success. A pseudonym was given to each participant to ensure

confidentiality. The researcher arranged interviews that took place in the school building

and lasted about an hour with each participant.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Lester (1999) explained that a variety of methods can be used in a

phenomenological study such as interviews, conversations, participant observation, focus

groups, and analysis of personal text. He also emphasized that the researcher's focus is

to get to the maximum depth. Roberts (2010) further explained that creating a timeline is

significant in the collection data to schedule interviews, field test, travel, and follow up

with participants. In addition to students' transcripts, the researcher in this study primarily gathered data through in-depth interviews with the participants. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio instrument in an area designated by the school. With permission from the school and student participants, the researcher reviewed school documents to discover evidence of the challenges, factors, and influences leading to the students' high school graduation and enrollment in college.

Creswell (2013) described the data collection procedure in phenomenological research as, "interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 79). The phenomenon of the study is the experience of challenges, struggles, perseverance, and success as perceived by the Latino high school students. The interviews were a way to gain a profound understanding of each participant's subjective experience, motivations, and actions (Lester, 1999). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) described interviews as clarifying the nature of knowledge and significant for revealing the powerful stories that give meaning to our lives.

Through the interviews, the participants viewed the phenomenon with the researcher "bracketing," also known as "epoche," or putting aside their own experiences to take an objective approach toward the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994) participants are asked two main general questions in phenomenological research that lead to textual (description of what the participants experienced) and structural (setting that influenced the participants) description of their experience and also an understanding of the similarities of the participants' experiences: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts of situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? In addition,

the open-ended interview questions utilized the framework of Bronfennbrenner's (1979)

ecological systems theory, Rutter's (1987) resilience theory, and Dweck's (2006) growth

mindset model, seeking to understand how the experiences of the participants led to their

academic success. The interview questions were open-ended and were guided by these

theories. Each theory was prominent in discussing the environmental influences that

played a major role in the interviewees' lives.

The questions were tested for reliability and validity through a focus group of

Latino college graduates who had attended an urban high school. The researcher

developed responses to the questions from her own background in order to establish

transparency as her role as participant-observer and to uncover any biases as an

interviewer. Interviews with participants were tape recorded and transcribed.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the first step was to listen to the

tapes and read the transcripts several times to reach an overall understanding. Creswell

(2013) suggested writing memos with key ideas and phrases in the margins of transcripts

to assist in exploring the database. To interpret data collected from interviews, the

researcher first summarized each interview and used horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994),

which is to, "highlight significant statements or quotes that will provide an understanding

of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Next, the

researcher identified significant topics and developed clusters of meanings into themes

that were coded (Creswell, 2013). The coding identified patterns that focused on the

environmental and personal influences based on the ecological systems theory, resilience

theory, and the mindset theory. Each coding represented challenges, influences, and strategies that led participants to success.

Creswell (2013) further suggested using the themes to write a textual description and structural description of the participants. Based on the written descriptions, the researcher synthesized them to present the essence of the phenomenon. Creswell claimed that in phenomenological research, it is important to understand individuals' common or shared experiences of the phenomenon, "in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features in the phenomenon" (p. 81).

Summary

It is critical in this research to focus on the education of the Hispanic population, which is the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States; and therefore, will significantly impact the nation's culture and economy. The researcher examined the factors and influences that contribute to Latino students' graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in a post-secondary institution. In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher used in-depth interviews to understand the personal experience of the Latino students and to learn about the culture, experiences, and plight of the Latino students. This study can help guide other Latino students towards academic success through programs and interventions. Further, findings may be applied to federal, state, and local policy decisions and programmatic implementation at the school and district level.

The in-depth interviews took place in June 2014. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data. One of the interviews with a Latino male was not recorded; therefore, it was not used in the study. The study

findings were shared with the district administrators, who provided permission to the

researcher to conduct the study, and the findings may be useful to provide interventions

within the school setting.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

This study examined the perspective of Latino high school seniors related to the factors they identify as influencing their graduation from an urban high school and their decision to enter a post-secondary institution. The research focused on the challenges, motivating factors, and strategies experienced by participants in high school that impacted their graduation from high school and enrollment in college. Through open-ended, in-depth interviews, the participants were able to identify how their environment: family, school, and community, as well as their reports of self–motivation, led to their academic success.

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors and influences that contributed to Latino students' graduation from an urban high school as reported by Latino high school seniors who are enrolled in post-secondary institutions. This study intended to discover the academic, social, personal, family, and environmental challenges that students faced during their high school years and what influences led to their high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary institutions. In order to discover those factors that Latino students identify as leading to completion of an urban high school, this study utilized in-depth interviews and self-reports of Latino students as a resource for understanding their success.

This research study addressed three research questions:

1. What are the challenges that a sample of Latino students, who are currently seniors in one urban high school and preparing to graduate and enroll in a post-secondary institution, indicate that they have faced during their high school career?

2. What are the influences that Latino students identify as motivating their successful graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in post-secondary institution?

3. What strategies do Latino students report as effective in overcoming the challenges they face in successfully completing high school?

Participants.

Participant A. Participant A is an18-year-old female who is a citizen, second-generation Mexican. She lives in a two-bedroom rental house with her mother, stepdad, and two brothers (13 and 14-years-old). She sees her father occasionally. Her mother is limited in English, and she helps translate everything to her. She also helps her mother take care of her two brothers. She is a hard-working student with a grade-point average of 3.2. When she is faced with a challenge, she turns to music. "I realized that music was really the only thing there for me, so I just kept doing it." She is involved in the community and the school's extracurricular activities such as: a music band, TV production, and photography. She describes herself as being very optimistic. "Just seeing things positive actually helps make everything positive." She received several scholarships for college and plans to attend a four-year state university.

Participant B. Participant B is a 17-year-old female who is a first-generation Dominican and a non-citizen who has lived in the United States for 14 years. She lives

with her mother in an apartment in a house and is the only child. She is very argumentative with her mother, because she feels that her mother is holding her back from accomplishing her goals because she has not completed the steps for her to obtain her citizenship. When asked about her relationship with her mother she responded, "It's bittersweet; I feel like she's ignorant, because right now she's jeopardizing my future because she didn't go to college. She didn't get to finish high school, and she needs to send this paper to them, my citizenship certificate." She works and is involved in an after-school program. Her high school GPA is below average at 1.4. She plans to go to a community college and is working on getting her citizenship.

Participant C. Participant C is a 17-year-old male who is a citizen, second-generation Dominican. He lives with both parents and his two younger sisters in a house they own. He has an older sister away at college. His father owns a small grocery store where he sometimes works to help him out. In the past, he has been discouraged to continue his education because he wanted to help his father with the store. "I was actually thinking about dropping out and going to help him out." However, he continued his education. He plays high school football and runs track. His GPA is below average at 1.7, and he plans to attend a community college and then go into the Navy. He hopes one day to become a video game graphic designer.

Participant D. Participant D is an 18-year-old male who is a citizen, second-generation Puerto Rican. He lives with his mother and younger brother in an apartment. He is considered legally blind, wears glasses to help his vision, and is partially deaf in his left ear. His family has moved back and forth from Puerto Rico and New York because his mother was running away from his father because he physically abused her. He does

not want a relationship with his father because of the violence he has witnessed with his parents. His mother is bipolar and his brother has ADHD. He tried to commit suicide twice in his life, but he was able to overcome his low self-esteem with the support of his grandfather, mother, and coaches from the wrestling team. He is below average with a GPA about 2.0 and is also classified as a special-education student.

He is not expressive, especially with his mother. When asked how was his relationship with his mom, he stated, "It's tough; it's because I'm not the type of person to express myself or really speak much, so it's kind of hard because she doesn't know what I'm thinking, and she gets frustrated at times." He claims that moving from place to place and hiding from his father has limited his interactions with others. He also expressed that he sometimes feels like an outcast in school. "I'm really like an outcast to most students, like, I'm pretty much a ghost so, you know, I don't speak to anybody that much. Like the only people I would really speak to is the people like my teammates from the wrestling team and that's it." In addition, he was bullied in school because he was so quiet. He plays soccer and is a member of the school wrestling team. Wrestling has helped him overcome many of his challenges. He plans to continue his education and attend a diving institute to work in underwater welding.

Participant E. Participant E is a smart, 17-year old-female, citizen and second-generation Mexican. She is the youngest of five. She lives with her parents and two older sisters in a two-bedroom rented house. Her brothers live elsewhere. She helps her family with everything, since her dad lost two fingers and feeling in his arm while working construction. She takes him to his doctor's appointments so she can translate, and she researches all the medication they give him. Her mother works as a babysitter.

She sees the way her family struggles because of the language barrier and hopes to work hard to have a better life. She is determined to do well and realized during her high school experience that, "If you want something really badly, you actually have to fight for it; it's never going to be given to you, so it's like there's always some little obstacle in that way that you have to prove yourself to be stronger [than] in order to succeed." What makes her happy she claims is, "Knowing that somewhere and sometime in life, I will be who I want without being judged, knowing the fact that everyone thought I was going to end up pregnant in high school with no future. I'm graduating in less than a week, and I have no kids and I do have a future."

She is in several extra-curricular activities in school such as the Ladies of Distinction and the United Nations Club. She has a 2.7 GPA and plans to go to a community college.

Participant F. Participant F is a 17-year-old male who is a non-citizen, first-generation Dominican. He moved to the United States about two years ago. He lives with his mother, stepfather, and two younger sisters in a rented house. He has a good relationship with his biological father who he sees often. He is very inquisitive, believes he is the smartest kid, and claims, "I learn everywhere." He started his own technical support business with his uncle and is always working. His main challenge was learning English in such a short period of time. He has played all sports in high school. His GPA is a 2.0, and he plans to go to a community college when he graduates from high school.

Participant G. Participant G is a female who is 18-years-old. She is a first-generation Mexican and a non-citizen. She lives with her parents, a younger brother, and a sister in an apartment. She loves the outdoors and nature. She describes herself as a

simple, humble, and caring person. "I care a lot about others, especially like my friends and family, so when I see people hurting them or saying rude things to them, it makes me go like crazy." She ran track her sophomore and junior year, but found it very challenging so decided to withdraw from the track team her senior year. As a senior, she participates in the Marine training program, because eventually she would like to join the Marines after attending one year in a community college.

 Participant H. Participant H is 18-years-old. She is an American citizen, half Puerto Rican and half Jamaican. She was raised with her mother, so she identifies herself as being Puerto Rican. She lives with her mother, her twin brother, and two younger sisters in an apartment in a house. Her father lives in Jamaica, and she never sees him; however, occasionally he still has contact with his family that lives in the United States. Recently, her twin brother got hit by a car, which caused him to have a brain injury. As a result, he is very irate and aggressive, causing turmoil in her family. Her mother spends most of her time taking care of him, causing Participant H to feel like she has no support from her mother. Yet, she tries her best to do well to make her mother proud. "I always wanted her to have that faith in me, and so like that keeps me like doing what I have to do for her to not be disappointed in me."

 This is her first year in the high school after moving from an adjacent town because her family was forced to move because her mother lost her job. They were homeless and lived with family members. She said being homeless helped her work even harder. "It made me want to succeed all that more because, like, I see the situation we're in, and I don't want that situation, so it made me like motivated." She is an above

average student with a 3.9 GPA and is planning to go to a four-year state university where she received scholarships.

Participant I. Participant I is an 18-year-old female who is a citizen, second-generation Dominican. She describes herself as being humble, patient, positive, and down to earth. She lives with her mother, two younger brothers, and her 19-year-old uncle, the only survivor of a tragic home fire, who recently lost his parents and siblings. It was Participant's I maternal grandfather, his wife, her aunt, and uncle who died in the fire. As a result, she claims her mother and family have been depressed, yet this tragic accident made her family and community united. During her family's grief, she realized that, "I have to help myself, because everyone is in grief, and everyone is going through their own struggle and fighting their own battles, so it was difficult to, like, have someone to be there." Her mother was very devastated after the incident, and Participant I came to the realization that, in her grief, she has to find peace within herself. "These are the moments you have to be there for yourself."

Her GPA is 2.5, and she planned to go into the Marines after high school; however, she decided to go to a community college because of her family's situation. "I decided that I need to stay where I am and stay close to my family, which is what matters the most . . . for now I'm going to college and then in a couple of years down the road, if it's still what I aspire to do, then I'll take it."

Table 4.1 shows the demographics of each of the participants in the study.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Citizen Status	Family Unit	Siblings	American Schooling	GPA 11th	12th	Final Average
A	18	F	Mexico	2nd Generation	Dual – Mother Stepfather	2	K-12	88.1	92.0	86.8
B	17	F	Dominican	1st Generation Non-citizen	Single	0	K-12	69.3	75.9	71.2
C	17	M	Dominican	2nd Generation	Dual	3	K-12	71.3	68.7	71.1
D	18	M	Puerto Rican	2nd Generation	Single	1	K-12	77.8	72.0	72.0
E	17	F	Mexican	2nd Generation	Dual	4	K-12	82.3	90.8	86.6
F	17	M	Dominican	1st Generation Non-citizen	Dual – Mother Stepfather	2 & 7 Step-brothers	11 &12	73.2	69.9	71.6
G	18	F	Mexican	1st Generation Non-citizen	Dual	2	1-12	76.0	77.1	76.6
H	18	F	Puerto Rican	2nd Generation	Single	2 &Twin brother	K-12	---	83.8	83.8
I	18	F	Dominican	2nd Generation	Single	2	K-12	69.0	73.9	70.2

Data Analysis and Findings

The researcher categorized the responses to each question based on students'
immediate environment, aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem. The
microsystem is where the student lives, the immediate environment of family, peer group,
neighborhood, school, and church (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem explores
the activities, roles, and interactions of the student and the student's immediate
environment. In addition, the researcher focused on self-awareness aligned with
resilience theory (Killian, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2000; Rutter, 1987; Reyes &
Elias, 2011), and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory.

Research question 1. *What are the challenges that a sample of Latino students,
who are currently seniors in one urban high school and preparing to graduate and enroll
in post-secondary institution, indicate that they have faced during their high school
career?*

Self.

Insecurities/Stress. Eight of the students described themselves as feeling a sense
of insecurity or being overwhelmed, causing them to feel stressed. Participant A
expressed her insecurity when someone told her she couldn't sing; she also shared
moments in where she felt overwhelmed,

> I do have moments where I break down, and like, I have all this stress because
> when things happen, I just, I let it go, and then it just keeps adding up and then
> when something really hits me hard, it's like, oh my God, I have all these things
> to do and I break down.

Participant B shared that, at times, she's stressed and miserable because of the arguments with her mother. When her mother sees that she's on the wrong track, she starts to compare Participant B to her father in a negative way, which results in her being insecure.

Participants C, D, E, and G all felt insecure when they claimed, "I didn't fit in." Participant C claimed that when he was a freshman in high school, a challenge he faced was not fitting in because he was Hispanic and the majority of the students were Black. Participant D found it difficult to fit in because he felt like an outcast, "I'm really like an outcast to most students, like I'm pretty much a ghost . . . I don't speak to anyone that much." He believes he's an introvert because of his childhood and not wanting to talk to anyone about his abusive father. "I was so afraid of that stuff coming up that I avoided people, and they have their opinion that I was weird and all that stuff, and I ended up getting picked on . . . I was bullied." He confessed that before high school, he tried to commit suicide twice. He expressed his stress when describing how he felt during wrestling practice when it all hit him at once, "That was the first time I ever cried in front of everybody . . . I busted out in tears, and I wasn't expecting that at all, I was just so frustrated." He admitted that he has low self-esteem and whatever he does, he feels that it is not good enough.

Participant E feels insecure when she is compared to her siblings and when the family judges her on appearance, and she claimed, "My weight has always been an issue for them." She also feels insecure when she is judged by members of her congregation, mostly Caucasian and Hispanics, because they believe she won't become successful in the high school she attends.

Participant G felt insecure when she was on the track team, "It was so hard, especially, like, there's a lot of competition between the track team [members]." She found that being on the track team was stressing her out, and believed she wasn't going to make it on the track team in a college, therefore she quit.

Participant H felt stressed and insecure when her family became homeless during her junior year in high school. Participant I claimed she felt discouraged to finish her education because school was too difficult. She felt more discouraged when other classmates were getting accepted to prestigious schools and she was attempting to go to a community college.

Family.

Insufficient family income. All participants live with at least one parent, and all of them live with siblings except one. Only three of the participants live with both parents. None of the parents of the participants went to college and many of the participants are the first to go to college in their immediate family. Insufficient family income seems to be a challenge for seven of the participants, and it has become the motivating factor for wanting to continue their education.

Participant A stated, "My family didn't have a lot of money . . . I would go out with my friends, and they would go shopping and get all these things and I'm just, 'Oh that's okay, I don't need anything.'" Participant C felt discouraged about continuing his education because he wanted to help his father with their store, "I was actually thinking about dropping out and going to help him out." Participant D was homeless when they first left Puerto Rico and came to New York. First they lived with an uncle and then in a

shelter until his mother found an apartment. He claimed his mother does, "Odd jobs, like cooking and selling food and cleaning other people's houses," to survive.

Participant E's father lost his job when she was five because he lost two fingers in a construction accident; therefore, she receives social security, which ends when she turns 19 years old. Her mother lost her job for about a year while she was in high school and emphasized that they had to limit their spending. She reported that she was discouraged from continuing her education and to work, instead, to help the family financially,

I felt discouraged when I saw that my mom didn't have a job and my dad didn't work either, so we diminished funds. So I believe that if I dropped out of school I would probably be able to work a part-time or full-time job and make money for them to be able to pay rent and stuff like that.

Presently, her mother works as a babysitter to help maintain bills, and the participant works at an ice cream store, which also helps her family out. Participants F, G, and H also work to help maintain their own finances. Participant H was homeless for about six months when her mother lost her job, and this has motivated her to do well in school because she never wants to be in a predicament like that again. Lack of sufficient income was identified as a motivating factor, influencing the students to work hard and do better than their family.

Language barrier. Four participants found that their parents' language barrier was a concern and resulted in their parents' lack of involvement in their school, and in addition, it has created challenges for them in finding good paying jobs. Furthermore, some participants had difficulty in school because of the language barrier. Participant A

described the challenges she faced during her high school experience because her mother doesn't speak English,

> My mom speaks English, but she doesn't speak it like fluently. So she doesn't always understand everything that she has to sign or she won't. I speak Spanish fluently, but sometimes I, myself, don't know how to, like, explain certain things to her. So, I'll have papers for her to sign but she won't really know what she's signing or why she's signing, and we won't really get on the same page . . . then, having two younger brothers, I basically take care of my younger brothers to help out my mom, and I actually tutor my other brother, because he's really bad in math, so I have those two that I try to help take care of.

> Participant D described his mother as having menial jobs because of the language barrier. Participant E explained that a household rule is that they cannot speak English, only Spanish, because her parents do not understand it. She researches her father's medication because her parents don't understand what the pills are for. "I'm usually, like, the one who researches about everything in the health department, so usually I give them instructions of how to use certain pills, what pills not to take . . . ." She also faces challenges with English because her primary language is Spanish,

> People are, like, at the 12th grade reading level, [but] I'm still challenging like 8th grade and 9th grade . . . I have to like think about it in the way it will be sounding in Spanish like to English . . . people will be, like, 'How are you in the 12th grade, and you still don't know how to pronounce words right?'"

She expressed her frustration because of the limitations of the Hispanic community, not being able to find a job, and their limitations because of the language barrier.

Participant F admitted that his main challenge during the two years he spent in high school in America was the language barrier. He explained that for the first six months, he was focused on learning English because, "If you don't know English, you are pretty much lost." He learned English, passed all his Regents exams and classes. In addition, he started his own technical support business from home. The language barrier has been a challenge for some of the participants, but they appear to work hard to learn the English language and help their family overcome the language barrier.

School.

Chaotic/Disruptive students. When asked, "How would you describe your school," all of the participants used words such as: disruptive, chaotic, bad, zoo, and jail. Participant A felt discouraged in continuing her education because of her frustration with other students and their disruptive behavior. "Students that don't really care, [they] end up arguing with the teacher, and I'm sitting there, 'Like, are you serious?' Then the teacher ends up not teaching." She claimed that security guards take a long time to get to the classroom and the class period is wasted.

Participant B believes her school will be better if everyone works together,

I feel like this school has much potential, but teachers and kids and students don't work together enough to make it as good as it can be. So, I felt like my school could be like a zoo one day, and you [then] everything could be calm, everything could be going good, so I don't know.

When asked to describe her teachers, Participant B stated,

We have a handful of teachers that actually care about the students, and there's those teachers that [are], like, "Oh, I don't care, I get paid for being here anyway

whether you do your work or not." When you have people like that, it just makes the students rebel and act worse. So they're, like, "Oh, my teacher doesn't care, so I'm going to disrespect every teacher in the school building," even though every teacher in the school building doesn't deserve it.

Participant C described the school as chaotic because of the students; however, he believes that the teachers are good. He described the teachers as being understanding and knowledgeable. Participant D claimed that throughout his high school career, it's been hard for him to focus because of the chaos, "Students running around in the halls fighting, and it's like in the middle of class." He further reported the challenges faced with teachers,

There were a few teachers that I would ask for help, and they wouldn't bother helping me. They would completely ignore me, and my classmates would look at me like they were crazy, you know, and the classmates saw what was going on.

He also stated that he was bullied in the school.

Participant E also believes the students are disruptive, and therefore interrupt instruction. She described the high school as, "Bad, bad students, good teachers." She added, "There's a lot of people who are very ignorant and believe that, just coming to school is for them to distract other children not actually getting an education." She emphasized that the distractions are in both the classroom and outside the classroom, "Students picking fights, picking on people, if you're smart they try to cheat from you instead of actually trying to learn; bullying people that are smarter than them just because they don't know better."

Participant F described the school as a big jail, "We come every day to learn nothing." He added, "In this school, they don't teach you anything, so you do nothing all day, the whole day . . . you go in the classroom, the teacher normally just stays on the same topic like a month."

Participant G thinks the school is horrible, "I hate it so much . . . the food is disgusting, the people are so rude, they're ignorant, can't stand them." She also mentioned that many kids are bullied because they are being judged and students don't allow others to be themselves. She expressed her concern that many teachers exhibit favoritism and allow students to get away with certain things. Like Participant F, she believes she could have learned more,

> I wish I was more, like, better with history, because I really like history, but the way teachers teach or the way that the classroom is . . . they have no control over the students sometimes, so it's like we don't learn anything.

Participant H finds the school a bit disorderly, and like the other participants, she complained about students disrupting instruction, "Some of the teachers, they teach, and then other teachers, you know, the kids are disruptive, so they're like, 'Oh, whatever, it doesn't matter.'" Participant I also described the school as being chaotic, "The students don't know how to prioritize their time . . . they don't come to school for education, they come to school to hang out, socialize." She feels like she didn't acquire any information. School she claimed,

> Feels so practiced, it feels like they're just feeding me what I need to know in order to pass the classes and just keep moving on. I don't feel like I learned

anything practical that will help me later on in my life . . . . It felt like everything

had to be memorized, I look back at it, and I don't really know anything.

Academics. Seven participants faced challenges academically during high school.

Some expressed that transitioning to high school was challenging, therefore their 9th

grade year was difficult; whereas, others faced challenges in specific classes. Participant

A claimed that math is her worse subject, yet confirmed that when she practiced and

studied, she found herself making an improvement. She never failed, her lowest grade

was a 65. Participant B complained about failing Earth Science because the teacher was

out sick for a long time and the substitute didn't teach; therefore, she failed the class. She

also had difficulty with Geometry and failed her sophomore year. Moreover, toward the

end of her sophomore year, her grades suffered because she was constantly arguing with

her mother, so she thought she would pay her back by not doing well in school.

Participants C, D, and G claimed that they had difficulty managing sports and

school work. Participant D acknowledged that he is unorganized and found Social

Studies and Math the hardest subjects. Participant G had to quit running track her senior

year, as she stated, "I didn't want to do it this year because it's too much work, it's so

stressful sometimes with this work."

Participant E and I admitted that hanging out with their friends and peer pressure

almost caused them to fail. Participant E thought she almost had to repeat the 10th grade,

"I had really bad grades because I was more into my friends than into school."

Participant I confessed that she made wrong decisions because of friends and

relationships, "I thought I jumped too soon and having like relationships, and I feel like I

chose the wrong friends, and I just, my mindset wasn't in school."

Community.

Unsafe. Many participants shared their concern about their community being unsafe. Participant C believes that there is an increase in violence in his community because of teenagers. His cousin, 23 years old, was shot and killed in the community. Participants B and D claimed they live in a quiet neighborhood; however, there are some incidents that have occurred in the past. Participant D shared that a guy tried to rape a woman in the elevator in his building, and one of his friends committed suicide in his building. Participant G described her neighborhood as, "ghetto" because it is a very busy street; people are hanging out and playing their music all the time, both Hispanics and Blacks. She complained about the noise, especially at night, "It's, like, night, and I'm trying to sleep, and they don't stop and it's disturbing." Participant I believes that her community is deprived of resources, which results in desperation and violence, "I feel like there are a lot of good things that people don't give us credit for, but I also feel like the people make it what it is . . . no one really takes care of the community or cares for the community."

Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 reflect themes that emerged from the three research questions and the response of the participants.

Table 4.2

Research Question 1: Themes and Responses

Themes	Participants								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Self									
Insecurities/Stress	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Family									
Insufficient family income	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Language Barrier	X			X	X	X			
School									
Chaotic/Disruptive Students	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Academics	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Community									
Unsafe		X	X	X			X		X

Research question 2. *What are the influences that Latino students identify as motivating their successful graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in post-secondary institution?*

The path to graduation was not easy for most of these seniors; however, there were several motivating factors that the participants identified as influencing their success.

Self.

Understanding self. The participants realized that in order to be successful, they had to find the motivation within themselves to prevail. They identified self-motivational

factors and influences that led to their graduation and their desire to continue their education. Participant A faced some challenges in math and realized with studying and practice she could overcome this challenge to do better in the class. She explained that throughout the past few years, she has done better in this subject because, as she emphasized, "I forced myself to sit at home and try to write over the problems a couple of times and try to remember how to [do them]. Because of this, I've been doing better in math." In addition, she at times felt discouraged about singing; however, when she would get compliments from strangers about her singing she commented, "It boosted my confidence level." That would motivate her to continue singing. She hopes that, in the same way certain artists inspire her, she wants to be an inspiration to others,

I want to be an inspiration to someone else and [have] the feeling of being able to stand on stage and just sing a song and have people crying and saying, "You know, you got me through the day." That's what I want to do. That's what keeps me going.

Participant A described herself as being funny, outgoing, and optimistic. She expressed that in order for her to be resilient and overcome obstacles; she always puts a smile on her face and, "Seeing things positive actually helps make everything more positive. I'm very optimistic."

Participant B believes she's motivated to do well because of the challenges she's faced with her father not being active in her life and not getting along with her mother. These challenges have prepared her to keep going, "I feel like I'm strong because I have been through so much in my life, and I just find a way to just overcome it." She is also aware of her laziness and realized that she has the potential to do better, "I could be

getting way better grades than I am now, and I need to get my act together because when I go to college, no teacher is going to cut me slack." Participant C expressed his interest in video games and claimed that this has motivated him to want to finish school and become a video game designer, "I like video games, so I would like to study to try to like create video games." He believes that he is a hard worker and acknowledges that when he puts his mind to anything, he can succeed.

Participant D realized that he needed self-motivation to distract him from the challenges he faced because of his disability and challenges at home and school. When he lost part of his hearing, he taught himself sign language and the Morse code. He also taught himself how to draw at a young age, "I have a thing that, like, I teach myself something new every couple of months." Participant E learned from her challenges and recognized that in order for her to do well, she has to work hard.

> I know that the world is not easy, that if you want something really badly, you actually have to fight for it, it's never going to be given to you. So it's like there's always some little obstacle in the way that you have to prove yourself to be stronger in order to succeed.

Participant E emphasized that one has to survive in this world by focusing and getting things done, "We're all like little caterpillars when we're younger, and it's your choice to either become a butterfly or get killed by an animal." She also expressed her belief in focusing on what she wants and accomplishing it. "I believe that if you're strong and resilient and do anything you believe is right, that's like a way to succeed." She is proud of herself because she was able to take Advance Placement classes, be involved in

extracurricular activities, raised her GPA to 3.4, and was "able to speak without the deeper accent than my family does."

Participant F was in the United States for only a year when he realized he needed to focus on learning English in order to graduate and move forward in anything. He taught himself English in six months by using the Internet, watching TV, and trying to communicate with others only in English. He acknowledges that he is self-motivated and, many times, when he sees nice things, like cars and houses, it makes him want to work harder. "If I study and work hard, [it] is the only way." His hard work has led him to be successful in his own technical company with his uncle and in school.

Participant G realized that she was lazy, and the laziness has conflicted with her becoming a better athlete and student,

> I just have to learn how to prioritize my time and everything, because I like to procrastinate a lot . . . so I would do homework the last minute, projects the last minute . . . I like to say I'm pretty smart, but it's just that I'm a really lazy person, so if I have no motivation, I won't do much, which is really bad.

When she stopped running track, she motivated herself to work harder.

Participant H is always motivated to do her best. The challenges her family has faced being homeless has motivated her to succeed.

> It would seem like my grades would have fell down or something, to me, because like I don't know, it made me want to succeed all that more because, like, I see the situation we're in, and I don't want that situation, so it made me like motivated.

Participant I, like Participants B and G, also self-reported laziness, and she knows if she focused and put her mind to her work, she would've done better with her grades. She also found the motivation to academically succeed when her family faced tragedy, and her mother was in a depression. She realized that she needs to work on herself.

I feel like I mostly have to help myself because everyone is in grief, and everyone is going through their own struggle . . . it was a difficult time to have someone to be there. My mom wasn't there for me, because my mom was pretty devastated, so you just feel like, "Oh, you kind of, like, those moments you've kind of got to be there for yourself."

She added that the family tragedy, "Opened my eyes to what life was really about . . . . Self-motivation was definitely the key, because I realized that I have to do things for myself." She affirmed that the motiving factors and influences contributing to her success was self-acknowledgement of where she wants to be in the future:

Where I see myself in five to 10 years, I want to be someone that influences other people, you know, motivates other people. I believe that education is the only way to get somewhere in life, because, I mean, yeah you can have money and, you know, luxuries, but the reality is it's why they get to where they want to be.

She feels proud that she's made it to 18 years old and hasn't faced the challenges that some at her age have:

I've made it to 18 without ever being in jail or pregnant or ever touching a drug, or ever doing anything that I feel like would change my life forever. I feel like I've had so many opportunities and choices to lead, to go into the wrong path . . .

Family*.*

Desire to be better off than their parents. Seven participants identified the desire to be financially better off than their parents as a motivating factor to graduate from high school and continue their education in a post-secondary institution. Participant A described her challenges growing up in a home with little money.

> Growing up, I didn't have a lot of money, my family didn't have a lot of money . . . . So I think the money plays a big role in me trying to get a better education and get a good job, get stable, and then buy my mom a house. You know, get her what she really deserves, too.

In addition, wanting to be better off than her parents motivates her to do well in school.

> I don't want to end up growing up, getting married, and having kids and for my kids to think, "What am I going to eat today, or I want this new jacket, but I don't know if my mom can afford it."

Participant C emphasized that his family played a significant role in motivating him to do better than his family. Although his father owns a store, Participant C asserted that he doesn't want to work at a little corner store seven days a week like his father. Participants D and E expressed their desire to get out of the neighborhood and help their family. Participant E described the struggles of her parents not being able to find a job. "Here they can't find a job anywhere, and they cannot live off any resources." She explained that watching her parents struggle has played a role in her success. She expressed her motivation to do better than her parents to, in turn, provide for them,

> My main focus is being better than my parents, having a better lifestyle than they did . . . My motivation is, like, getting my parents out of here, taking them back

to the place they were raised in, and, like, sending them money or whatever, so that they're safe there.

Participant D claimed that he is motivated to succeed to help his mom and to get out of the neighborhood. Participant E said that her main focus is to be better than her parents and hope to have a better lifestyle than them. Participant G saw how her family struggled and emphasized how she wants to do better than her parents. Her motivation is to focus on helping her family. "I want to be able to get my mom something when she gets older and my dad, too; like I want my brother and my sister to have somewhere to stay." Her family's situation has influenced her to provide a better future for herself. Participants H and I have also experienced their parents' struggle. Participant H is motivated to never be in a predicament where her family was when they were homeless. Participant I expressed the challenges her mother has been through and recognizes her desire to be better than her mom:

> My mom has been through a lot of struggles, and that helps me, like, kind of have the idea that I have to do better for myself, because I know what my mom has gone through, and I don't want to be in that same position.

Parents' encouragement. All the participants have claimed to have parents that believe education is the key to success; in turn, this has motivated and influenced them to continue their education. Participant A confirmed that her mother is her biggest supporter. "She makes me study, and I may argue, but I know that she does it for the best, so, and here I am, so I did good." Participant B does not see her father; however, her grandfather played a key role in her life, and she remembered ever since she was young, him emphasizing the importance of getting an education,

My grandfather, he used to always tell me, "I want you to go to school, I want you to do this," and ever since I was little, I was wanting to be, I'm still stuck, between being a lawyer, and being a teacher.

Participant C said that his family's conversation always centered on school and the future. Participant D, like participant B, has a grandfather who he claimed, "Was like my second dad," who motivated him to do well in school. He described how his grandfather helped alleviate some of his stresses: "My grandfather, always being there for me, like, the way he approached things with me . . .he'd always take that weight off my shoulders." In addition, his mother supported him to go to school to do well and participate in sports. Like Participant C, Participants E and G claimed that conversations with their parents centered on education and money. Participant E explained that her parents believe that "Education comes first, so dating around your 40s is good." Participant G expressed that her conversations with her parents often are about her future and what she wants to do. Her family never had the opportunity to go to college, and therefore, encouraged to continue her education,

Nobody, really, in my family would have thought to go to college. Like my mom, she didn't, my dad didn't, and I'm the oldest, so I want to be able to set a good example for my brother and my sister, even though I'm not going to a four-year school. But I still try . . . there's a lot of people in my family, like in Mexico . . . they get pregnant at, like, 16, and they don't get to go to college, or they, like, run away.

Participant F claimed that he didn't want to go to college until his mother encouraged him. "Well, I wasn't going to go to college, but my mother forced me." He

also reported that his father and his seven sons motivate him to continue education. "My dad makes me think . . . my dad makes me feel so proud." Participant H also confirmed that her mother motivated and influenced her to continue her education. "I always wanted to have that faith in me, and so, like, that keeps me like doing what I have to do for her to not be disappointed in me." She also added that her family, overall, pressures her about the importance of education. Participant I believes that her mother, along with others, helped her make it to where she is. "I would have never made it if it weren't for the help of everyone around me."

School.

Extracurricular activities. Seven of the participants expressed their devotion to extracurricular activities, which have guided them through high school and influenced their success in school. Participant A is a member of the school music band, television production, and photography. Though she expressed the demands of being involved in these extracurricular activities in school and balancing school work, she expressed her passion for music. "I realized that music was really the only thing there for me, so I just kept doing it." Participant B is involved in an after-school program that she claimed has been her motivating factor to do well in school. At the after-school program, there is homework help, various workshops, and field trips that are geared to help students' personal growth and academic success. She has been participating in this program since her freshman year and emphasized that she learned to take ownership of herself and be responsible for her own actions. In addition, the program director was a male role model to her. "Me and Mr. W, have this kind of father/daughter kind of bond." She also

discovered she was a good poet and joined the poetry club and she also joined the Entrepreneurship Academy during the summer.

Participant C played football his last two years in high school and ran track during all four years of school. He believed, like Participant D that participating in sports has taught him several skills and has been his motivation to finish school. Participant D believed that being on the wrestling team has influenced him to become a better person. He described the support he received from his coaches. "The way my coaches were pushing me . . . made me realize what I'm really capable of doing." Through failure, he was able to identify his greatness,

Last year, I won seven matches and lost 16 . . . this year I won 16 and lost seven, and I won a trophy . . . that was the first time I was proud of myself. I've never won anything in my life, so, like, getting my first trophy was, like . . . the biggest thing in the world.

Participant E received a great amount of support, being involved in several clubs, the Ladies of Distinction and the United Nations Club. She expressed that being in these clubs supported her without judging. Participant F joined the tennis team his last year of high school, and Participant G ran track for two years and quit her last year because it was very time consuming.

Community.

Desire to move out of the community. All of the participants expressed their desire to move out of their community. Participant A, though involved in her community volunteering at various places, emphasized her desire to move out. Participant A described why living in her community encouraged her to continue her education.

Not wanting to live there all my life, wanting to, like, do better and be at a better place, so that by the time that I get out of college, I can buy a house somewhere else. I don't want to say "better neighborhood," but a neighborhood where the people, where the kids try harder, you know what I mean. Like where they take their education more seriously, because the majority of the kids don't take it seriously.

Participant C explained that he doesn't want to end up like another "street Dominican," and because of his cousin's tragic death, he is motivated to move to another community. He stated, "My number-one priority is to move out of here, and I want my family out of here also." Participants D, E, G, and I also confirmed that their motivation was to continue their education to be able to move out of their community. Participant D stated, "I want to get out [of] . . . the environment, the school, and the neighborhood." Participant E said, "My motivation is to get out of here . . . have a better lifestyle." Participant G also said, "I want to get out of here." Participant I described her community as being deprived of everything, and that's her motivation to get out.

Table 4.3

Research Question 2: Themes and Responses

Themes	Participants								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Self									
Understanding Self	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family									
Desire to be better than parents	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Parents' Encouragement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School									
Extracurricular Activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Community									
Desire to move out of community	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Research question 3. *What strategies do Latino students report as effective in overcoming the challenges they face in successfully completing high school?*

All of the participants reported that their resilience, family cultural beliefs, and morals were strategies that helped them overcome their challenges; whereas, seven participants believe that being involved in extracurricular activities in school guided them to their academic success. In addition, six of the participants attend church in their community and believe that having faith in God has guided them to overcome the challenges and be resilient.

Self.

Resilience or strategies to overcome challenges. All participants have faced

many challenges and have been able to overcome current and past hardships because of

their resilience. Participant A described having difficulty with math and found that with

practice, she did better. Even when she failed, she did not give up. "I failed that math

test, but I'm going to take it over." She discussed her challenges in math but was diligent

to try her best,

> My math average went up to 70. I am very proud of myself because a number of
>
> tests I failed, but the last test we took, I got an 86, and I really was, like, the
>
> happiest person, and my teacher laughed and he wrote in my yearbook and said
>
> you're the most improved student.

In addition, despite her challenges, she worked hard and received a couple of

scholarships for college.

Participant B faced some challenges in school and at home; however, she finds

the strength to learn from the lessons and become resilient. "I feel like I made it because

I try . . ." Participant C faced challenges fitting in because the majority of the population

was Black. He said a strategy that worked for him was staying quiet in class. In

addition, he faced challenges trying to balance playing football, running track, and

completing school work. He claimed that he learned to organize himself and, "I stopped

having more free time, and I went to bed earlier, just finished homework, and studied for

tests."

Participant D faced hardships at home with his mother being bipolar and his

younger brother having ADHD, in addition to him having his own challenges, suffering

from depression, getting bullied in school, and having difficulty academically. He believes what brought him peace is learning various things, which he teaches himself using the Internet. "I taught myself how to snowboard, taught myself how to play guitar and piano," in addition to learning sign language, sketching, and the Morse coded. When he faced challenges in school he said, "I beat myself up, and I try pushing harder."

Participant E faced challenges with learning how to speak English, and faced challenges at home with her family not being financially stable. She learned how to practice speaking and reading out loud in English. She improved academically and received a partial scholarship for post-secondary school. She also claimed that her determination to finish school was to be better than her parents. She added that her determination was,

> knowing that somewhere and sometime in life, I will be who I want to be without being judged, and knowing that the fact that everyone thought that I was going to end up pregnant in high school with no future. I'm graduating in less than a week, and I have no kids, and I do have a future.

Like Participant E, Participant F had difficulty learning the English language. He realized that working hard and teaching himself will lead him to achieve. He described himself as being a hard worker. Working hard has helped him overcome the language barrier.

Participant G expressed her concern in understanding herself in order to help overcome some academic and personal challenges.

> I had to grow as a person, you could say, because, I mean, when I first started in 9th grade, I was really quiet . . . I was really shy, I guess, so I had to learn how to

just understand what I liked and what I didn't. I tried to identify. It took me a while, but I guess I know now.

She claimed learning from her mistakes has helped her overcome challenges she faced.

I guess from learning from my mistakes and just even when you feel like giving up, you shouldn't. I tend to think a lot about now but not about the future, which isn't good. So I have to start thinking about what I do now and how is it's going to affect me later, because I might want to do something for now, like make some choices for now, but I should make decisions that will affect me better in the future.

Participant H also works hard and focuses on her academics to help her overcome the challenges she faces at home. Participant I stated that the foundation of her belief and her optimistic attitude has helped her overcome challenges, especially the tragic death of her family members in a fire,

of who I am as a person, my beliefs, my morals, all of that, helped me realize that that's what life is about, you know. Everyone comes with an expiration date, and we can't just hold on to the terrible things that happen in life. I mean, there's good things, there's bad things, there has to be a balance somewhere, so I just feel like, I guess, my positivity helped me overcome a lot of bad things that could have come my way.

She realized, like the majority of the participants, that she had to work to help herself first before being able to help anyone else.

Family.

Cultural beliefs and morals. The Hispanic culture was a prevalent theme throughout the strategies the participants claimed in overcoming their challenges. All of the participants emphasized that working hard, getting an education, and taking care of the family is priority in their culture. In addition, many believe when you work hard, you can do anything. Participant A was always encouraged to continue her education because her mother instilled the value of education,

> Growing up, my mom always said that education was the door to everything, you know, if I had the opportunity to go farther than she did then I should take it. In my family, if you fail a test, she makes you sit there and realize what you did and she makes me study. I may argue, but I know that she does it for the best, and here I am, so I did good.

When she felt discourage about her music, her mother supported her because she said her family believed if you want to do it, you can,

> My mom is really my biggest supporter, so when I told her about what she had said, the girl had said I couldn't sing, like she was there to support me. She was telling me, "Don't believe her because you know you can sing, you have talent, and it's something that you want to do."

Participant B reported that her belief in God has helped her overcome some challenges. She described the tragedy that happened to her friends in a house fire and stated,

> I feel like you can't sit here and be bitter over some situation for a long time. I believe everything happens for a reason, so maybe only God knows that maybe something worse could have happened, and at least we know that there is a better

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place cause I don't think, I'm just too happy, I can't let this affect me, it's just not me.

Participant C claimed that conversations with his family are consistently about school and their future. Participant C stated that his family has instilled in his mind that hard work pays off. All the participants see how their family struggles financially to stay afloat, and the constant conversation with family about education and money has led to their success.

School.

Extracurricular activities. Seven participants believed that being part of a team in sports or a club were effective strategies that helped them overcome the challenges they faced. Participant A was involved in band, photography, and TV production. As she stated, "Music is my life . . . and that's what keeps me going."

Participant B acknowledged that the after-school program she attended helped her overcome her challenges, because they were very supportive of her and the director of the program became a role model to her. Participants C, D, F, and G played sports, which has guided them to develop skills such teamwork, determination, and hard work. Participants C and D claimed that being in sports made them motivated to work harder. When Participant D won a trophy in wrestling, he was proud of himself, and he explained his challenges in wrestling because of his disability of not being able to see,

I feel my way through. So I always used my disability as an excuse to stop practicing, and I guess my coach didn't want to hear it, and my teammates didn't have any mercy on me, and I was getting my butt kicked at practice . . . I caught myself getting aggressive in the practice, and my coaches kept me on after that,

and after practice, I was still really upset, but like the next morning, I realized that

I still have to push myself.

Participant E participated in the Ladies of Distinction and the UN club where she

has learned leadership skills, which have guided her to overcoming the hardships at home

and academically.

Community.

Church. Participant A is involved in the community; she participates in any event

that consists of her singing or being part of a band. Participant B volunteers in various

organizations in her community. Participants A, B, C, D, E, and G all attend church in

the community. Many believe their foundation in going to church and believing in God

was a strategy that led to their success.

Table 4.4

Research Question 3: Themes and Responses

Themes	Participants								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Self									
Resilience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family									
Cultural Beliefs and Morals	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School									
Extracurricular Activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Community									
Church	X	X	X	X	X		X		

Summary of Results

The results of the research identified positive and negative environmental factors, such as family, school, and community, which influenced Latino high school seniors to graduate from an urban high school and enroll in a secondary institution. The participants' negative environmental influences resulted in significant risk factors that they had to be overcome in order for them to graduate from high school. In addition, the research identified self-awareness and resilience, which built protective mechanisms in each individual and played a major role in guiding participants to academic success.

The participants identified several challenges they faced during their high school career and motivating factors that helped them overcome those challenges. Many of the students described a feeling of insecurity or being overwhelmed, causing them to feel stressed. Eight out of nine students felt stressed for various reasons. However, all the participants experienced self-awareness and reflected in their ability to understand themselves based on their experiences, and this helped them identify their insecurities and stress. As a result, self-awareness led to self-motivation and guided them to become better students in school, leading to academic success.

Seven out of nine participants described the challenge of insufficient family income and emphasized that their motivating factors to successfully graduate from high school was their desire to do better than their parents. In addition, disruptive students and chaotic school environment was a prevalent theme that all participants highlighted as a challenge they faced in school. The urban-suburban school is characterized as having disciplinary concerns, lower academic achievement and lack of parent involvement (Lee, 2005). All the participants complained about the other students' behavior and the

organization of the school; however, these participants were able to overcome this challenge and continue to focus on their studies. Moreover, seven students out of nine faced challenges academically and, yet, worked hard to improve their academics by studying and practicing.

Even though the language barrier had become a challenge for many Latino students and their families, only four out of nine participants described the language barrier as being an issue and a challenge for them. Some found an issue with parents not knowing English, and others complained about challenges they faced because their primary language is Spanish. Research shows that some Hispanic students fall behind their peers because many attend kindergarten not speaking any English (Maxwell, 2012). Surprisingly, the language barrier was not a prevalent challenge that the participants faced.

As indicated by the free and reduced lunch statistics (52%) the community served by the school and attended by the participants in the study is characterized by poverty, and more than half of the participants believe living in their neighborhood was a challenge. All the participants acknowledged that in order to escape the conditions of their neighborhood, they must obtain further education to be career ready. All emphasized the desire to complete a post-secondary education, find a good job, and make enough money to move out of the community.

Overall, family played a critical role in the participants' lives. All participants affirmed that their cultural beliefs and their parents' encouragement influenced them to work hard to obtain an education and eventually take care of the family. Although there are many cultural differences in the Latino culture, they mostly share the same value of

family loyalty, hard work, and the importance of education and religion (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Six out of nine students attend church and believe that their spiritual belief has impacted their life to become a better individual and to guide them in accomplishing their goal.

Many of the students, seven out of nine, found that involvement in extra-curricular activities in school was crucial during the high school years and was an effective strategy to overcome challenges. They believed that being involved in extra-curricular activities established a foundation for working hard, determination, and learning how to become a team player. Participation in extra-curricular activities; whether sports or clubs was a motivating factor to their success.

There were many challenges the participants faced; however, their reports indicate that those challenges, in fact, shaped them to become resilient individuals. A resilient individual copes with adversity and possesses protective mechanisms when faced with adverse conditions such as poverty, dysfunctional family, and a failing school (Richardson, 2002). They were compelled to develop strategies to overcome the challenges, strategies that would be useful as they moved into college and career.

Ultimately, the research revealed the resilience each participant acquired as they overcame the challenges that emerged in their environment. The environmental risk factors contributed to the development of resilience and certain protective mechanisms, creating the foundation that resilience created in each participant (Killian, 2004). Resilience in children refers to positive outcomes in spite of severe threats to their development (Masten, 2000). All the participants demonstrated resilience, despite their challenges, and they were able to overcome their challenges to graduate from high school

and enroll to a secondary institution. The majority of the participants were educated in American schools, K-12th, which can be a possible indicator of their success.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States and is estimated to be the majority of the population in the U.S. by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). As the Latino population increases, the number of the Latino students in the public school education is also increasing. In over a decade, from 1994 to 2005, the number of Latino students nearly doubled (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). With this significant demographic change and the advancement of technology and the competitiveness reflected in our economy, it is important to focus on the education of these students, as they will have a major impact on the economic and social well-being of the nation's future (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Graduating from high school is a significant milestone in adolescent development and a critical predictor of future success (Chun & Dickson, 2011). Latino students lag substantially behind in high school graduation rates at 63%, compared to the U.S. average of 78.2% (Ortiz et al., 2012). In addition, Latino students drop out of school at about four times the rate of White youth (Reyes & Elias, 2011). One significant factor influencing the high dropout rate is the substantial achievement gap that exists between Latino students and their White counterparts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). In addition to lower graduation rates, Latino students demonstrate inferior attainment of literacy competencies and, therefore, poorer college preparedness rates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). This achievement gap and its potential impact on social

progress and economic growth indicates the need for attention to this problem, and it compels the focus on research that will lead to the development of proposals for prevention and intervention to guide these students to academic success (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Despite the academic challenges the Latino student faces, there are factors that have influenced some Latino students to overcome challenges and achieve their goals. By identifying these factors through interviews of the successful students themselves, this study provides opportunities for program development and design, potentially leading to successful academic outcomes in the high school environment. This study examined the factors that motivated nine Latino students to successfully graduate from an urban-suburban high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. The qualitative study discovered the challenges and influences, including personal, academic, social, family, and environmental effects that students experienced during their high school years. Research-based theories, such as ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), resilience theory (Killian, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2000; Rutter, 1987; Reyes & Elias, 2011) and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory guided the research as models for understanding the persistence of some Latino students who graduate from urban high schools and pursue further study in post-secondary institutions.

The research for this phenomenological qualitative study was designed to provide information to help schools guide Hispanic students to academic success, leading to high school graduation and further education in a post-secondary institution. The study used the following research questions as a guide to understand the challenges the participants

faced and the influences and strategies that helped them overcome the challenges that led to their success:

1. What are the challenges that a sample of Latino students, who are currently seniors in one urban high school and preparing to graduate and enroll in post-secondary institution, indicate that they have faced during their high school career?

2. What are the influences that Latino students identify as motivating their successful graduation from an urban high school and enrollment in post-secondary institution?

3. What strategies do Latino students report as effective in overcoming the challenges they face in successfully completing high school?

This chapter discusses the implications of findings related to the emerging themes from the interview questions. Furthermore, it discusses any limitations the study presented and recommendations to support Latino students during their educational experience to guide them toward academic success. Last, the conclusion summarizes the study based on analysis and results.

Implications of Findings

Literature reveals that there is a critical need to raise the Latino high school and college graduation rate because this population is growing and will have an impact on the national economy and future prosperity. Through the lenses of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), resilience theory (Killian, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2000; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Rutter, 1987) and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory, the study sought to better understand how Hispanic students overcame their challenges while attending an urban-suburban school and what guided them to graduate from high school.

Research question 1: challenges. The research found that there are many

challenges faced by the Latino participants living in an urban environment and attending

an urban-suburban school. Urban schools are usually located in an environment

characterized as poor neighborhoods that are overcrowded, and they are characterized by

high poverty, crime, and welfare dependency rates, as well as educational failure (Simon

et al., 2011). This study indicated how various environmental factors; specifically the

immediate environment consisting of family, school, and community, affected the

participants. Changes and conflict reflected in one environmental factor can change or

affect others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Eight out of nine participants found that their

insecurities led to stress, which was a major challenge that participants faced. The

majority of the participants felt that they didn't fit in with the rest of the student

population in high school because they were Hispanic. Other participants complained

about being insecure because they were being compared to others, and people didn't see

them for who they really were.

The participants reside in a community characterized by urban poverty, and as a

result, their family's insufficient income, the school's chaotic organization with

disruptive students, and the unsafe community have been the challenges the participants

faced during their high school experience. Only three of the participants live with both

parents, and four live in a single-family home. Two live with their mother and stepfather.

None of their parents has a college education; hence, insufficient family income was a

prevalent theme that students identified as a challenge. In addition, all participants

described the school as disorganized, mostly because of the chaos created by disruptive

students, and they found it challenging to learn in that environment. Five of the

participants complained about living in an unsafe environment, and they are eager to get an education to obtain a "good paying" job in order for them to move out of their current homes and neighborhoods.

Research question 2: motivation and influences. Participants identified several motivating factors that influenced their successful high school graduation and enrollment in a post-secondary institution. Ecological systems theory (Bronfennbrenner, 1979), resiliency theory (Rutter, 1987) and mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) provide a model for understanding and exploring the human-development factors that influence students to persist despite adversity. All participants had a better understanding of themselves when faced with specific challenges, and they found motivation from within to overcome challenges. The challenges were embraced, and the participants were able to cope with failure, in turn, benefiting from it as it led to a "growth mindset," or a belief in their capacity to succeed with effort, motivating them to academically succeed (Dweck, 2006).

Family impacted the lives of these participants. The majority of the participants experienced their family's struggle for survival and identified a desire to do better than their parents as their motivating factor to continue their education. All participants were encouraged by their parents to continue their education, confident that education leads to stability and a better life. In addition, six participants affirmed that the desire to move away from their current community was a motivating factor that influenced them to achieve academic success.

In school, extracurricular activities were a motivating factor that kept these students focused and encouraged to do well academically. The participants built traits

such as leadership, teamwork, and self-esteem during their participation of extracurricular activities; in addition, they developed a connection to the school, and this helped guide them through the adversity they faced. A predictor of student development and success is their environment, and if a student is at risk in an urban school setting, a positive school culture and a connection to the school can help a student succeed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Research question 3: strategies. Resilience and the "growth mindset," in addition to other environmental factors, such as family values and culture, helped these individuals cope with adversity to overcome challenges. Each individual thrived on the challenges and saw the failures as an opportunity for growth and success (Dweck, 2006). The research, along with the literature, revealed that the Latino family has a strong foundation of cultural beliefs and morals, therefore, building protective mechanisms in each individual and an evolving personal resiliency. All participants have experienced challenges and have been able to overcome current and past hardships because of their resilience. Some of the values that are instilled in the foundation of the Latino culture and expressed by the participants are their rooted family orientation and their identification as hard workers, respectful, and loyal, and their understanding of the significance of education and religion (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). All participants expressed the belief that their cultural values and morals were strategies they used to overcome challenges and persevere in high school. Six participants regularly attend church and also expressed the belief that their faith in God was a strategy to help overcome their challenges.

Research shows that being involved in extracurricular activities helps inspire and motivate students by meeting the students' individual needs and interests (Holloway, 2002). Seven participants identified that participating in extracurricular activities in school guided them to their academic success. Three of the participants were involved in various school clubs, such as photography, band, Women of Distinction, United Nations Club, and after-school programs. Four of the participants were involved in sports, such as football, track and field, tennis, and wrestling. Involvement in extracurricular activities, "encourages peer interaction, promotes cooperation, builds student-adult relationships, provides structure and challenge, connects student to school, and draws students, especially minorities and women, to science" (Holloway, 2002).

These participants have a growth mindset and view challenges and failures, like the resilient individual, as an opportunity to improve and learn (Dweck, 2006). Dweck (2006) described the growth mindset as, "The belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (p. 7) and explained that through this mindset one changes and grows through individual experience resulting from effort and recognition of effort. Instead of giving up easily, these participants were persistent when faced with challenges, and they see it as a path of mastery as they reach higher levels of achievement (Dweck). They did not see themselves as failing; instead, they learned from their environment, which cultivated resilience in them to move forward.

Limitations

The study was a small sample size of nine Hispanic students. A larger sample size would have added richer and more ample data. In addition, the research used a qualitative methodology; however, adding a quantitative component could have helped

the researcher survey Latinos from other urban high schools. Moreover, the study focused on high school seniors only. Expanding the study to Latinos in secondary institutions would have given the researcher insight into the resiliency of the Latino college student.

A further limitation is the fact that the researcher worked at the school where the research took place and had limited interactions with the participants. The researcher may have influenced the participants and, therefore, they may have been more receptive to answering questions. In addition, the researcher is Latina, which could have potentially biased the responses from the participants; however, the researcher's knowledge of the participants and having a common background contributed to the spontaneity and fluency of the respondents.

Recommendations

Through the qualitative study, the Latino high school seniors provided insight into the challenges they faced during their high school years and the motivating factors and strategies that they identified as influencing their high school graduation. Their narratives identified the environmental factors that played a major role in their lives. In addition, the Latino students' resilience and growth mindset are portrayed in their stories. This data offers additional confirmation of the research of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), resilience theory (Rutter, 1987) and Dweck's (2006) mindset theory, identifying how environmental factors can create resilience and a growth mindset to overcome challenges.

Latino high school programs. The data suggest ways to help high school administrators and staff create a variety of programs and initiatives that will help the

Latino student during their high school experience. These programs, reflecting the findings of this study, would be designed to focus on various aspects of the students' development during a critical stage in their life. The Latino high school dropout rates are four times higher than the dropout rates of their White counterparts (Reyes & Elias, 2011). In addition, in the U.S., 40% of students that enter college must take remedial courses (Wagner, 2008). Therefore, it is important to implement programs for the Latino student that will ensure academic excellence, improve self-esteem, build a school-home bridge, promote cultural awareness, encourage community involvement, foster a positive school climate and prepare students for college and career.

Ortiz et al. (2012) suggested that in order to improve factors contributing to the low academic status of Hispanics, programs need to be developed to promote a connection between Hispanic students and their families, and the educational system from kindergarten through college. Also, the findings of the study indicate that programs should be created to support English Language Learners as they are trying to become acclimated to their new environment and a new language. Researchers, Behnke et al. (2010), suggested that more Spanish-speaking staff, academic and personal support, and improved English as a second language classes would minimize the dropout rate.

College programs. In order to meet President Obama's goal of making the United States the world leader by 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) projected that college graduates have to increase by 50%, nationwide, in 2020. That graduation rate for Latinos will result in more than half of Latino students qualifying to obtain a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Although there has been an increase in the college enrollment of Hispanics, only 13% of Hispanics attained a

bachelor's degree in 2010, compared to 39% of Caucasians (Fry, 2011). Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that college programs be designed to improve the Latino student retention rate. In addition to academic programs, colleges should consider incorporating programs to help students feel a sense of belonging by promoting their culture and having Spanish-speaking staff that can guide the students during their college stay. The findings also suggest that programs should be designed to include internships and workshops to prepare and guide the Latino college student for the real world. Students are graduating from both high school and college unprepared for the workplace (Wagner, 2008). Therefore, it is critical that Hispanics acquire an education to provide a pathway to financial stability and economic success (Gandara, Civil Rights Project, & University of California, 2008).

Professional development. The student interviews conducted for this study reflect the need to provide professional development for teachers in schools that are impacted by a growing Latino demographic. This will help provide knowledge of the Hispanic population, skills in dealing effectively with the Latino student, and building relationships with students and their families. The professional development would offer strategies for responding to the challenges faced by the changing demographics of the student population. Furthermore, the teachers who give instruction to the Latino English Language Learners need resources and support to help guide students to improve academically.

Future studies. Future studies should focus on exploring perceptions of teachers and administrators, through both quantitative and qualitative study, with respect to the Latino student and the changing student population in order to help develop programs to

guide their curriculum. In addition, studies focusing on Latino parents can offer insight as to the challenges they identify and what improvements can be made to assist the Latino family in America. Finally, future studies should focus on the impact that education in an American public school, K-12th grades, has on Latino students compared to Latino students who have been educated for less years in an American public school.

Conclusion

It is critical to educate the Latino population, as it is the fastest growing minority population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Hispanics lag behind in high school graduation by 63%, compared to the U.S. average of 78.2% (Ortiz et al., 2012). It is alarming that this growing population of Latino students, drop out four times the rate of their White counterparts (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Poverty, the achievement gap, and fewer educational resources are several reasons why these students are failing and dropping out (Chun & Dickson, 2010). "Over the course of a lifetime, the earnings difference between a dropout and someone with a high school degree can amount to more than $700,000. What's more, that dropout will cost taxpayers nearly $300,000 in lower tax revenues, additional government benefits, and incarceration costs" (Kirp, 2013, p.7). Therefore, it is imperative to establish high educational standards for the Latino population as their achievement will impact the socio-economic well-being of the nation's future (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Challenges. This research explores the factors that led nine Hispanic high school students to graduate from an urban high school and enroll in a post-secondary school. The research identified the environmental challenges the participants faced during their high school career such as: insufficient family income, chaotic school/ disruptive

students, academics, and living in an unsafe environment. Through the lens of ecological

theory, the researcher is able to understand how the participants' environment has an

impact on their life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In addition, all but one participant faced

insecurities that some identified as trying to fit in; whereas, others complained that their

insecurity was finding their identity because they were always being compared to others.

Participants C, D, E, and G all felt insecure when they claimed, "I didn't fit in."

Participant C claimed that when he was a freshman in high school, a challenge he faced

was not fitting in because he was Hispanic and the majority of the students were Black.

Participant D found it difficult to fit in because he felt like an outcast, "I'm really like an

outcast to most students, like I'm pretty much a ghost . . . I don't speak to anyone that

much." Participant E feels insecure when she is compared to her siblings and when the

family judges her on appearance, and she claimed, "My weight has always been an issue

for them." Participant G felt insecure when she was on the track team, "It was so hard,

especially, like, there's a lot of competition between the track team." These insecurities

led to stress, which became a challenge for them, yet through their resilience and their

growth mindset, they were able to overcome both their environmental and inner-self

challenges.

Influences. Resilience theory identifies how these participants were able to cope

with adversity and how they possessed protective mechanisms when faced with the

adverse conditions such as poverty, dysfunctional family, a failing school, and

insecurities (Richardson, 2002). Furthermore, Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory

distinguishes how the participant is able to view challenges and failure as an opportunity

to learn, leading to their motivation to strive for higher educational goals (Dweck, 2006).

As a result, the participants were influenced by many factors that led to their academic success. All participants were able to deal with their insecurities by recognizing the challenge as it generated self-awareness and resilience. Participant A expressed that in order for her to be resilient and overcome obstacles; she is optimistic, "Seeing things positive actually helps make everything more positive. I'm very optimistic." Participant B believes she's motivated to do well because of the challenges she's faced with her father not being active in her life and not getting along with her mother. These challenges have prepared her to keep going, "I feel like I'm strong because I have been through so much in my life, and I just find a way to just overcome it." Participant E learned from her challenges and recognized that in order for her to good; she has to work hard, ". . . there's always some little obstacle in the way that you have to prove yourself to be stronger [than] in order to succeed." Participant F acknowledged that he is self-motivated, "If I study and work hard, it's the only way." Participant G realized that she has to work harder, "I just have to learn how to prioritize my time and everything because I like to procrastinate a lot . . ." Participant I found the motivation to academically succeed when her family faced tragedy, and she realized that she needs to work on herself, "I feel like I mostly have to help myself because everyone is in grief, and everyone is going through their own struggle…"

Living in poverty played a major role in their motivation as the majority of the participants expressed their desire to be better off than their parents and move out of their poor neighborhood. Participants A, C, D, E, G, H, and I all expressed their family struggle and their desire to be motivated to do better than their parents. Participant A described her challenges growing up in a home with little money, "My family didn't have

a lot of money . . . So I think lack of money plays a big role in me trying to get a better education and get a good job." Participant E described the struggles of her parents not being able to find a job, "Here they can't find a job anywhere, and they cannot live off any resources." She explained that watching her parents struggle has played a role in her success. "My main focus is being better than my parents, having a better lifestyle than they did . . ." Participant I expressed the challenges her mother has been through and recognizes her desire to be better than her mom. "My mom has been through a lot of struggles, and that helps me, like, kind of have the idea that I have to do better for myself."

All the participants confirmed that their parents' encouragement played a critical role in leading them to high school graduation and to furthering their education. Participant A confirmed that her mother is her biggest supporter. "She makes me study." Participants C, E, G, H, and I claimed that conversations with their parents centered on education and money. Participant E explained that her parents believe, "Education comes first." Participant F stated that he didn't want to go to college until his mother encouraged him. "Well, I wasn't going to go to college, but my mother forced me." Participant I believes, "I would have never made it if it weren't for the help of everyone around me."

In addition, the seven participants' involvement in extra-curricular activities gave them a sense of belonging, responsibility, and leadership skills, influencing them to become persistent in their educational goals. Participant A expressed her passion for music. "I realized that music was really the only thing there for me, so I just kept doing it." Participant B expressed that being involved in the after-school program, the director

guided her and was a male role model to her. "Me and Mr. W. have this kind of father/daughter kind of bond." Participant D described the support he received from his coaches. "The way my coaches were pushing me . . . made me realize what I'm really capable of doing."

Strategies. The participants reported that there were several effective strategies that helped them overcome their challenges. They all recognized that their resilience, when faced with obstacles, made them work even harder to successfully complete high school. In addition, the participants confirmed, as the literature reports, that their families' cultural beliefs and morals were strategies that helped them overcome their challenges. Participant C through I claimed that conversations with their family are consistently about school and their future. More than half of the participants believe that being involved in extracurricular activities in school and church in their community were strategies that guided them to their academic success.

Summary

This study contributes to the ongoing research and literature of the Latino population. The research explores the problems Latino high school seniors faced academically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually, during their high school experience, in addition to the influences that motivated them to continue their education. Although the literature confirms the challenges and statistics that project an uncertain and often daunting future for the Latino community, there are many Latino youths who thrive despite their poverty, educational disparities, and emotional and environmental stressors. This study provides insight into ways some factors influenced nine Hispanic youths to graduate from high school and enter a post-secondary institution.

The study provides an understanding of support systems or programs that are recommended to assist Hispanic students in overcoming the adversities they identify as their experience in an urban school and in preparing the students for college and career. Thus, the study has the potential to influence educational and political policy decisions as leaders need to focus on the growing population that will shape our country's social and economic future. It is clear that there is an urgent need to focus on educating Hispanic high school students to decrease the dropout rate and assist in leading students to seek further education to succeed in attaining economic stability. These results may persuade educational leaders to focus on enhancing the future of the Latino population as they will have an impact on America's stature and economic fate in a changing world.

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High School Dropout Rate of Latinos, Blacks,

■ Latinos Year 1990 ■ Latinos Year 2010 □ Blacks Year 1990 □ Blacks Year 2010
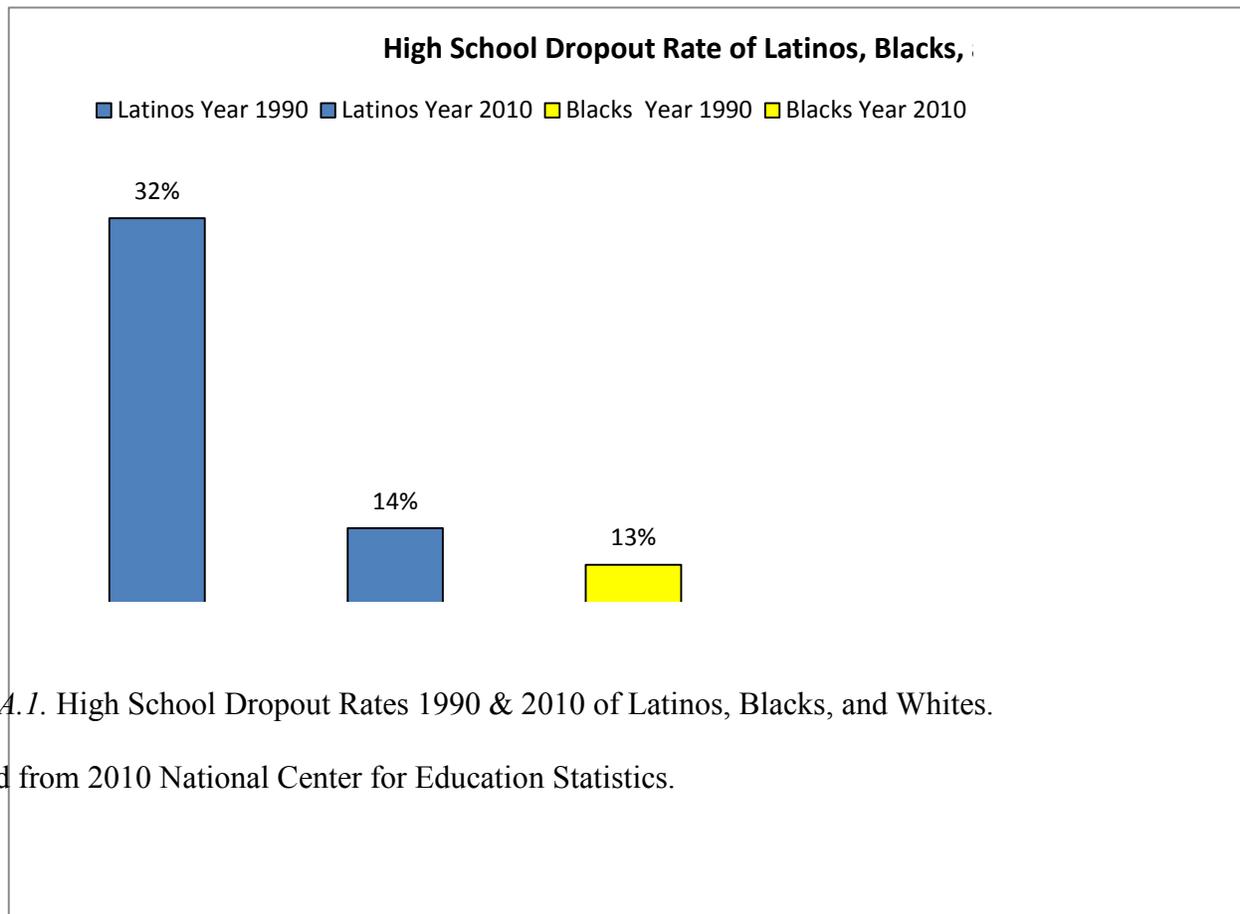
32%

14%

13%

Figure A.1. High School Dropout Rates 1990 & 2010 of Latinos, Blacks, and Whites.

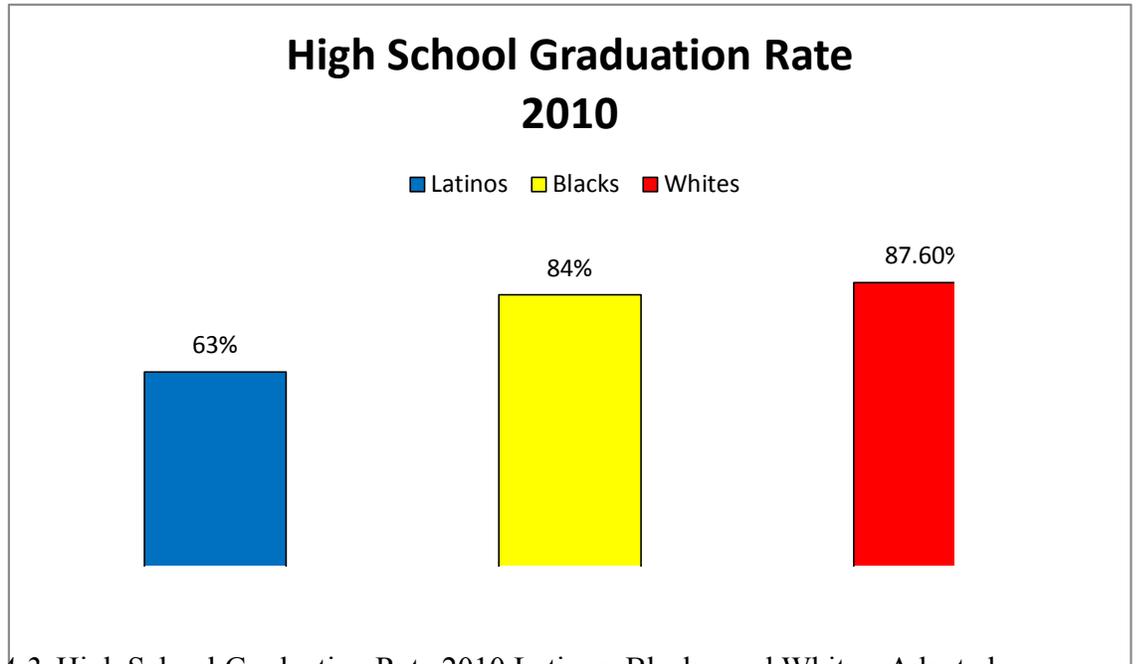Adapted from 2010 National Center for Education Statistics.

Figure A.2. High School Graduation Rate 2010 Latinos, Blacks, and Whites. Adapted

from 2010 National Center for Education Statistics.

Appendix B

Superintendent's Consent Form

Dear _____:

       I am currently a doctoral student in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. I am working on my dissertation and my topic is: The Factors that Hispanic Students Identify as Influencing their Graduation from an Urban High School and their Enrollment in a Post-Secondary Institution. I am requesting permission to conduct my study in your high school this spring semester 2014.

       The study will use in-depth interviews with six Hispanic high school seniors, three males and three females, that are on track of graduating from high school and have enrolled in college. With the assistance of the school counselor, I will be able to identify these students and ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. A pseudonym will be given to each participant to ensure confidentiality. This study can help guide other Latino students toward academic success through programs and interventions. In addition, the study findings will be shared with your district and may be useful to provide interventions within the school setting.

       If you have any questions regarding my research please contact me or my dissertation chair. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Nellie Martinez
Doctoral Candidate

Frances Wills
Dissertation Chair

Appendix C

Principal's Consent Form

Dear _____:

        I am currently a doctoral student in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. I am working on my dissertation and my topic is: The Factors that Hispanic Students Identify as Influencing their Graduation from an Urban High School and their Enrollment in a Post-Secondary Institution. I am requesting permission to conduct my study in your high school this spring semester 2014.

        The study will use in-depth interviews with six Hispanic high school seniors, three males and three females, that are on track of graduating from high school and have enrolled in college. With the assistance of the school counselor, I will be able to identify these students and ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. A pseudonym will be given to each participant to ensure confidentiality. This study can help guide other Latino students toward academic success through programs and interventions. In addition, the study findings will be shared with your school and may be useful to provide interventions within the school setting.

        If you have any questions regarding my research please contact me or my dissertation chair. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Nellie Martinez
Doctoral Candidate

Frances Wills
Dissertation Chair

Appendix D

Student Consent Letter

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College, and I am working on research for my dissertation. My topic is: The Factors that Hispanic Students Identify as Influencing their Graduation from an Urban High School and their Enrollment in a Post-Secondary Institution. I want to understand what factors you perceive such as: your family, social environment, and your own personal attributes, that have influenced your graduation from your high school and enrollment in college. In addition, I want to know what challenges you faced during your high school career and how you were able to overcome those challenges.

My research involves a conversation about your experiences in high school and a narrative I will write for part of my research. You will be interviewed at your school with a counselor present. Our conversations will be taped and I will also take notes. Your name or school's name will not be used in the study; a pseudonym (fictitious name) will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This study can help guide other Latino students towards academic success through programs and interventions. In addition, the study findings will be shared with your district and may be useful to provide interventions within the school setting.

This form is to request your permission to be interviewed by me for the purpose for writing my dissertation. The interview will take approximately an hour after school. All your responses during the interview are confidential. Please discuss with your parent and if you decide to participate please let your counselor know so you can sign the consent form.

If you have any questions regarding the interview process please contact me. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Nellie Martinez
Doctoral Candidate

St. John Fisher College
Institutional Review Board
Parental Informed Consent Form
(For use with minors)

Title of study: Factors that Latino High School Students Identify as Influencing their Graduation from an Urban High School and their Decision to Enter a Post-Secondary Institution

Name of researcher: Nellie Martinez

Phone for further information: ….

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to examine the factors and influences that contribute to Latino students' graduation from an urban high school as identified by Latino high school seniors who are enrolling in post-secondary institutions. This study intends to discover the challenges such as academic, social, personal, family, and environmental, that students faced during their high school years and what influences led to their high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary institutions.

Study Procedures:

- Six high school senior participants- three females, three males
- In-depth interviews will be recorded on a digital audio instrument and transcribed
- An area in the high school will be designated for interviews and a counselor from the school will be present during interviews

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: ….

Length of participation: one hour each participant

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

The study findings will be shared with the district administrators who provided permission to the researcher to conduct the study and may be useful to provide interventions within the school setting. This study can help guide other Latino students towards academic success through programs and interventions. Further, findings may be applied to Federal, state, and local policy decisions and programmatic implementation at

the school and district level. Moreover, the results may persuade those who are reluctant to exercise leadership in this area that policies that enhance the future prospects of the Latino population will have impact on America's stature and economic fate in a changing world.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

The researcher will protect the confidentiality of participants, school, and community with the use of pseudonyms (fictitious names) throughout the research study.

Your rights:
As the parent/guardian of a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to allow your minor child to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you or your minor child.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I, the parent or guardian of, a minor years of age, consent to his/her participation in the above-named study. I have received a copy of this form.

Print name (Parent/Guardian) _____

Signature_____ **Date**_____

Phone #_____

Print name (Investigator) _____

Signature_____ **Date** _____

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above appropriate referrals.

St. John Fisher College
Institutional Review Board
Student Informed Consent Form

Title of study: Factors that Latino High School Students Identify as Influencing their Graduation from an Urban High School and their Decision to Enter a Post-Secondary Institution

Name(s) of researcher(s): Nellie Martinez

Phone for further information: …..

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to examine the factors and influences that contribute to Latino students' graduation from an urban high school as identified by Latino high school seniors who are enrolling in post-secondary institutions. This study intends to discover the challenges such as academic, social, personal, family, and environmental, that students faced during their high school years and what influences led to their high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary institutions.

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The study findings will be shared with the district administrators who provided permission to the researcher to conduct the study and may be useful to provide interventions within the school setting. This study can help guide other Latino students towards academic success through programs and interventions. Further, findings may be applied to Federal, state, and local policy decisions and programmatic implementation at the school and district level. Moreover, the results may persuade those who are reluctant to exercise leadership in this area that policies that enhance the future prospects of the

Latino population will have impact on America's stature and economic fate in a changing world.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

The researcher will protect the confidentiality of participants, school, and community with the use of pseudonyms throughout the research study.

Your rights:
As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.
Print name (Participant) _____

Signature_____ **Date** _____

Phone #_____

Print name (Investigator) Nellie Martinez

Signature_____ **Date** _____

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above for appropriate referrals.

Appendix G

Interview Questions:

A) Family-

- Describe your home and environment?
- Where do you live? How's your neighborhood?
- Who do you live with?
- How is your relationship with your family?
- Who are you the closet with?
- What kinds of things do you and your family do?
- What are some things you talk about?

B) School-

- How would you describe your school?
- How would you describe your high school experience?
- What school activities are you involved in?
- Describe your friends.
- What kinds of things do you do with your friends?

C) Community-

- Are you involved in your community?
- Do you attend church?
- Do you work?

D) Self-

- How would you describe yourself?
- What makes you happy, sad, and angry?
- What have you done that makes you feel proud?

E) Challenges-

1) What are some challenges you faced during your high school experience?

   - In school? At home? In your community?

2) Were there times you felt discouraged to continue your education?

   - How would you describe the factors or incidents that led you to feel discouraged? In school? At home? In your community?

3) How did you overcome the challenges you faced?

   - Were there people who helped? Who were they?
   - What other factors can you identify?

What are some motivating factors and influences that have contributed to you graduating from high school and enrolling in a post-secondary institution?