



Listening to Latinas:

Barriers to High School Graduation



The National Women’s Law Center is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1972 to advance and protect women’s legal rights. The Center focuses on major policy areas of importance to women and their families, including employment, education, health and reproductive rights, and family economic security.

Founded in 1968, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) is the nation’s leading nonprofit Latino legal organization. Often described as the “law firm of the Latino community,” MALDEF promotes equality and justice through litigation, advocacy, public policy, and community education in the areas of employment, immigrants’ rights, voting rights, education, and language rights.



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Executive Summary

Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High School Graduation addresses the challenges facing Latina students in the United States today and explores ways to overcome obstacles that undermine their chances for success. With this report, the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) bring new voices to the conversation: those of Latina students themselves and the adults who work with them on a daily basis.

Latinas are dropping out of school in alarming numbers—a pattern that has serious and damaging repercussions for their future prospects and economic security. Yet little research has been done on the particular barriers that Latinas face or the strategies that might maximize their chances for success. This report aims to start filling that gap.

Toward this end, MALDEF and NWLC conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups with Latina students across the U.S. These qualitative research tools yielded both uplifting and disheartening stories about Latina students’ hopes and dreams, their life challenges and educational experiences, and issues that can affect their expectations and success. Additionally, teachers and program staff who work with Latina students added their perspectives on the barriers these students face and how schools and policymakers might improve Latinas’ educational experiences and prospects for the future.

This report shares many of the Latina girls’ stories, as well as input from teachers and program staff. It compares, contrasts, and in some cases weaves together these qualitative research findings with the existing literature and research on these issues from a variety of sources.

From this qualitative research and review of current literature, some clear themes emerge:

- ▶ **Latinas have high aspirations, but too many doubt their ability to reach their goals.** Many of the Latina girls surveyed and interviewed for this project had very high aspirations for the future. Substantial numbers of them want to have professional careers as doctors, lawyers, nurses, and scientists and understand that they cannot reach those goals without education. In fact, 80% of the students we surveyed want to graduate from college and perhaps go further. And 98% reported that they wanted to graduate from high school. Yet the dropout rates of Latinas are extremely high. The latest data show that 41% of Hispanic female students do not graduate on time with a standard diploma, leaving them with severe short- and long-term consequences for their economic security and health. And these realities affect the expectations that many Latinas have for their futures. One-third of the girls we surveyed do not expect to achieve their educational goals. With survey responses and through follow-up interviews, focus groups, and a review of existing research, NWLC and MALDEF explored the reasons for this disconnect.

- ▶ **The Latino community faces many challenges that help to explain the discrepancy between Latinas' dreams and actual expectations.** Latino students' academic achievement and dropout rates can be profoundly affected by the challenges that many of their communities face.

- ~ Poverty impacts students' preparation for school. Too few Latinos attend early childhood education programs, for a variety of reasons; many of the schools Latinos attend receive limited resources which can restrict learning opportunities; those whose families move to find work are forced to change schools frequently; and having inadequate community supports, such as parks and after-school programs, can affect Latino students' ability to succeed in school.
- ~ Immigration status creates instability for many Latino students. Students who are undocumented or who have family members who are undocumented experience anxiety and uncertainty about their futures, and face added financial barriers to higher education opportunities.
- ~ Limited English proficiency can make students more likely to fall behind and increase the risk of dropout.
- ~ Parental involvement, which has been correlated with better engagement in school and can increase the chances of graduation, is limited for many Latino parents due to a number of factors, including their own low levels of formal education, lack of familiarity with the American school system, and feeling unwelcome at their children's schools.

In addition, Latinas and Latinos face some similar challenges at school, such as concerns about school safety, attendance problems, disciplinary issues, and poor academic performance, all of which tend to limit student engagement in school and increase the risk of dropout.

- ▶ **Latinas face particular challenges related to the intersection of their ethnicity and gender.**

- ~ Gender and ethnic stereotypes. Many Latinas are influenced by family and societal expectations, often based on stereotypes of Latinas as submissive underachievers and caretakers. When these stereotypes are internalized, they may cause Latinas to doubt their chances for academic and career success and hurt their self-esteem, which can hinder their motivation and engagement in school. Also, many Latinas lack educational and career role models among their family members and peers to help them set goals and envision themselves reaching those goals.
- ~ Discrimination based on ethnicity and gender. Some Latinas still find that their teachers and classmates treat them differently—in both subtle and blatant ways—or have different expectations for them because they are Latina. This treatment makes them feel unwelcome at school and can affect their academic performance and graduation rates. Some feel unwelcome at school as non-native English speakers, some experience sexual harassment, and some do not get equal access to or encouragement in career and technical education programs for fields that are traditionally male but that tend to offer higher wages and better benefits than do traditionally female fields.
- ~ Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities. Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities are dropout risk factors for almost half of the girls who drop out of high school. Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy rates and teen birth rates of any racial or ethnic group—almost twice the national average. Many do not discuss pregnancy prevention or contraception with their parents, and many attend schools in states that limit sex education to abstinence-only curricula. Once

they have children, all girls, including Latinas, face enormous challenges to staying in school, graduating, and pursuing post-secondary options. Some of those challenges are financial and logistical, such as finding affordable, quality child care and safe transportation to school. Others are less tangible, such as discrimination and stigmatization by teachers and school administrators or policies.

- ~ Other caretaking responsibilities. Family caregiving responsibilities—typically for younger siblings or elderly relatives—may fall more heavily on Latinas than on Latinos. As a result, Latinas who have such responsibilities may be absent from school more often than are their brothers. And missing school can lead to disengagement, poor academic performance, and school discipline, all of which are correlated with higher dropout rates.
- ~ Lower involvement in school activities. Latinas tend not to get as involved in school activities or sports as Latinos do, which disadvantages the girls in a number of ways. In particular, there is a strong correlation between involvement in school activities and greater engagement in school, so students who are involved in sports and other school activities are more likely to stay in school and stay focused on goals and successful behaviors.

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the country, and Latinas are the fastest growing group of female school-aged youth. Latinas who drop out of high school encounter far more severe economic consequences (such as unemployment, low wages, and dependency on public support programs) than do Latinos. And Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates of any subgroup. Therefore, it is critical—for Latinas, their children and communities, our nation’s health and prosperity, and the realization of the American values of fairness and equality of opportunity—that serious resources be devoted to improving their graduation rates and chances of success.

Recommendations

The good news is that there is much that schools and policymakers can do to enable Latinas to overcome the barriers they face. *Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High School Graduation* makes a number of recommendations, many of which will help not only Latinas but also boys and students of other races and ethnicities. In summary form, they are listed below.

- ▶ **Invest in the Future of Latino Children.** Congress should fully fund and promote quality early childhood education initiatives including child care; conduct outreach to Latino families so they are aware of these opportunities; and provide access to education and training for child care providers. Congress should also expand access to family supports including housing, health care, nutrition assistance, and tax benefits.
- ▶ **Connect Latinas with Role Models and Engage Them in Goal-Setting.** Mentoring, dropout prevention, and college access programs that provide Latina students with access to positive role models and support to meet their goals must be better funded, more widely adopted, and further expanded. Schools must do more to connect Latina students with caring adults who can help them to develop and achieve their educational and career aspirations.
- ▶ **Ensure That All Students Can Pursue and Are Prepared for Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities.** Schools and community programs should undertake initiatives to get all students “college ready.” Congress should fund such initiatives, enact bills to enable immigrant

students to attend college, and increase financial support for students in need to secure higher education. The Department of Education should ensure that Latinas learn about funding opportunities and how to apply for them.

- ▶ **Ensure That School Environments are Culturally Inclusive and Free of Race/Ethnicity and Gender Discrimination.** School officials must rigorously enforce anti-discrimination policies. Schools and policymakers should support dual language programs for English Language Learners, work to create inclusive, multicultural environments, and offer quality after-school and summer enrichment programs. The Department of Education should enforce civil rights laws that prevent sex and race discrimination in educational programs and activities. And Congress should adequately fund civil rights enforcement and the development of multicultural curricula, and pass legislation that holds schools fully accountable for sexual harassment.
- ▶ **Help Latino Parents Get More Involved in the Education of Their Children.** Schools should develop and implement—and federal, state, and local governments should fund—parent involvement initiatives for the parents of Latino students, and ensure that Latino parents are made to feel welcome at school. Schools should conduct outreach to Latino parents and encourage them to attend college information sessions and meetings with college representatives. States and local communities should work to expand educational opportunities for Latino parents, including adult ESL and GED programs.
- ▶ **Improve Efforts to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Including the Provision of Comprehensive Sex Education to Students.** Schools should provide students with comprehensive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate sex education that includes information about contraception, abstinence, and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, in a culturally appropriate manner. Congress should end funding for abstinence-only programs, create a federal program dedicated to providing teens with comprehensive sex education, expand efforts to reduce unintended pregnancy rates among minority youth, and expand access to affordable contraception.
- ▶ **Support Pregnant and Parenting Students.** Schools can and must do more to support those students who do get pregnant and have children. Federal, state, and local governments should make funding and technical assistance available for such efforts. The most successful approach likely will be one that is comprehensive—addressing the physical, social, emotional, financial, and academic needs of pregnant and parenting students. Federal, state, and local governments should enforce Title IX and ensure that school personnel do not discriminate against pregnant and parenting students or impede their ability to stay in school.
- ▶ **Require Better Data Collection and Promote School Accountability.** To enhance accountability, schools should develop longitudinal tracking systems to enable the gathering and comparison of data on the performance of individual students. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education should require that schools maintain and report graduation rate data disaggregated by—in addition to other categories—gender and pregnant and parenting status, and such data should be maintained in a format that can be cross-tabulated for further analysis.



Introduction

Particularly in today's global economy, our nation cannot afford to leave any of our children behind. Rather, consistent with the fundamental values of justice, fairness, and equality—and in order to promote national productivity and strong, healthy communities—it is of the highest priority to ensure that each individual has equal opportunity, and the tools he or she needs, to succeed.

Unfortunately, however, our country's public schools still fail too many of our students at unacceptable human and economic cost. Over one million students entering ninth grade each year do not graduate from high school on time with a standard diploma.¹ Although the growing body of research and extensive media coverage of this crisis has emphasized the plight of young men, young women are dropping out at alarming rates too. And girls of color are at particular risk.²

The statistics for Latina adolescents reveal the scope of the problem. Forty-one percent of Latinas—as compared to 22% of White girls—fail to graduate from high school on time with a standard diploma.³ Failure to obtain a high school diploma has life-long negative consequences for Latinas' health and economic well-being, as well as a long-term impact on the general strength of the United States labor force. Almost half of Latinas between the ages of 25 and 64 who lack a high school diploma are unemployed. Those who are employed earn an average annual income of only \$15,030.⁴ These grim prospects have serious consequences: for example, 35% of Latina high school dropouts are forced to rely on Medicaid for health care services.⁵

It is critical to America's social and economic welfare that this problem be remedied, particularly because Latinas are the fastest growing group of female school-aged youth.⁶ This report concentrates on the experiences of Latinas in high school, the factors contributing to their lower graduation rates, and the strategies that can improve their chances for academic success. Some of the challenges faced by Latinas—those related to poverty, language, and immigration, for example—confront their Latino peers as well. But some of the barriers Latinas must surmount to graduate from high school appear to differ significantly—in intensity or kind—from those that face Latinos generally or non-Latino girls.

For too many Latinas, these barriers are related to teen pregnancy and parenting responsibilities. Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates of any ethnic group; approximately 53% of Latinas give birth at least once before age 20.⁷ And research confirms the common-sense judgment that pregnancy and parenting responsibilities are significant factors for many girls who drop out of school.

But Latinas also confront gender stereotyping and outright discrimination that undermine their self-confidence and cause them to lower their expectations for the future, heightening the risks that they will drop out of school. The intersection of ethnicity and gender discrimination to which Latinas can

be subjected by both teachers and fellow students can make them feel unwelcome at school and affect their academic performance and graduation rates. Moreover, many Latinas lack relationships with role models in the community who can help them to set goals and to envision themselves reaching those goals regardless of their family circumstances.

Project Goals and Scope

In 2008, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) set out to investigate the barriers that Latina girls face to completing high school. Our goal was not to gather statistics; we wanted to take a qualitative look at the educational experiences of Latina students. We focused on factors that either hinder or enhance Latinas’ academic progress and thus affect their prospects for success.

With the assistance of school administrators, teachers, counselors, case managers, and staff of Latina-serving organizations, NWLC and MALDEF distributed over 1,000 surveys to Latina students in programs and schools across the country.⁸ A total of 335 completed student surveys were returned. Staff from MALDEF and NWLC then conducted follow-up interviews with approximately 21 students individually and focus group discussions with approximately 26 additional students. We also surveyed 45 adult program staff working with Latina students in after-school programs, college access programs, and schools, and conducted in-depth follow-up interviews with 15 of these individuals.⁹ In addition, NWLC and MALDEF conducted an extensive review of the available academic literature on the experiences of Latino students in the United States.

This report adds to existing research by illustrating—in the voices of Latina students themselves and of the school and program staff who interact with them every day—the barriers to their success and some of the interventions likely to help them graduate and succeed. We explore how ethnicity and gender intersect in the lives of Latina students to create obstacles to their achievement. We shine a light on challenges Latina students face on a daily basis but that too often get overlooked or ignored, and suggest methods of addressing some of those issues so that Latinas in this country can have the educational experiences they need and deserve.

There is a Substantial Disconnect Between Latinas’ Aspirations and the Realities They Face.

I. Latinas Have High Aspirations.

Generally speaking, the Latina students we surveyed and interviewed had big dreams for their futures, which they hoped would include professional careers.¹⁰ They appreciated that education is key to reaching their goals. A number of students articulated the desire to become doctors, lawyers, nurses, and scientists. When asked “What is the highest level of education you would like to achieve?,” the vast majority of students who responded to our written survey, about 80%, reported that they wanted to at least graduate from college. Virtually all students who responded to the survey, 98%, reported that they wanted to at least graduate from high school.¹¹ See Figure 1.

Statements girls made to us demonstrate their strong motivation:

I want to have what my parents didn't I want to be someone in life.

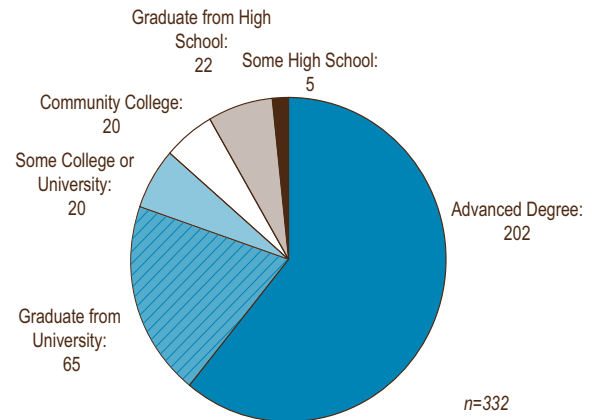
* * *

It's very important to me to graduate—it's one of my goals in life because nobody in my family really graduated from middle school or high school so I want to do that for myself, so I don't have to worry about working in fast food places or whatever.

* * *

My mom's mom she was a field worker—so she was the one who appreciated education—and she would say "Mija, get all you can out of education, get a college degree, 'cause I wanted it and I couldn't get it."

Figure 1: Highest Educational Level to Which Respondents Aspire



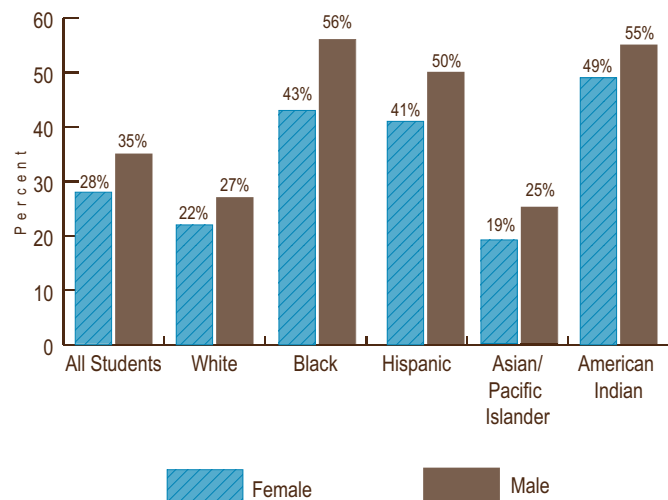
Source: Responses to NWLC/MALDEF survey of selected Latina high school students, 2008.

II. Despite Their High Aspirations, Latinas Drop Out in Large Numbers.

The dropout rates for Latinas are alarmingly high. In 2006, 41% of Hispanic female students did not graduate in four years with a standard diploma.¹² Although Latinas drop out at somewhat lower rates than Latinos (50% of whom dropped out in 2006), Latinas' dropout rates are higher than the national averages for girls and boys and significantly higher than the rates for White and Asian/Pacific Islander males.¹³ See Figure 2.

These dropout rates have serious and damaging consequences for Latinas' well-being. While all high school dropouts have a harder time achieving economic security than those with more education, girls in general, and Latinas in particular, face especially daunting economic chal-

Figure 2: Estimated Percentage of Dropouts for the Class of 2006 by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



Source: NWLC calculations based on Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center, *Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons: The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students: National Summary*, Education Week, June 2009, available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/06/11/index.html>.

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lenges. Overall, females without a high school diploma are more likely than their male counterparts to be unemployed, to earn significantly lower wages, and to be forced to rely on public support programs to provide for their families.¹⁴ In addition, girls who drop out have greater health risks and are less likely to have health insurance.¹⁵

Unfortunately, the problem is multi-generational, as the children of dropouts are more likely to drop out themselves, even more so if it is the maternal parent who did not graduate.¹⁶

These patterns hold true for the Latina population as well. Latinas who lack a high school diploma are one and a half times less likely to be employed than their Latino counterparts.¹⁷ Even for those who do work, the median annual earnings of Hispanic females who drop out of high school are only \$15,030 per year, which is only 65% of the \$23,368 in earnings paid to Hispanic male dropouts.¹⁸ Given their high rates of unemployment and low earning potential, 35% of Latinas who drop out of school are forced to rely on Medicaid for their health care services.¹⁹ Latina girls who drop out are also more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than are those who stay in school.²⁰

III. Many Latinas Doubt Their Ability to Reach Their Goals.

These sobering realities are reflected in the expectations that many Latinas have for their futures. Despite their high aspirations, many of the girls who responded to our written survey also doubted that they would be able to achieve their goals. Immediately following our question regarding aspirations, we asked: “Realistically, what is the highest level of education you think you will achieve?” **Sadly, a full one-third, or 34%, of the girls who responded to our written survey answered the question by checking a lower level of education than they had reported wanting to achieve.** See Figure 3. Twenty-two girls who aspired to go to college felt that the most they would in fact be able to achieve was to finish high school. Five girls reported feeling that they would not even make it to high school graduation day.

In follow-up interviews, we asked girls who responded in this manner why they felt that they would not be able to achieve their dreams. Their responses reflected a mix of actual experience and resignation:

A lot of kids drop out—you know you don't want to be part of it but there is a percentage [so it's possible] that you might be in there.

* * *

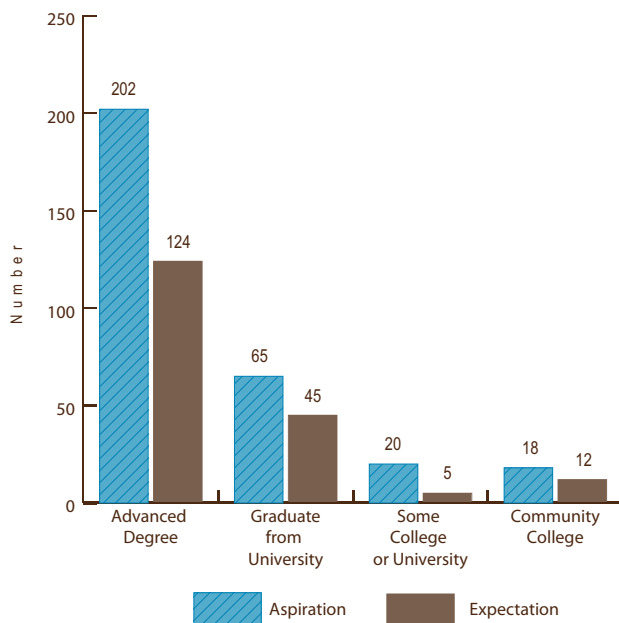
I'm trying to make it to the highest level I can make it to, the highest level that there is, but knowing me I'll probably make it a little lower.

Other girls responded that financial issues would prevent them from reaching their goals. We asked one respondent, who said she would like to graduate from a university and get an advanced degree,

but said that, in reality, she thought she would probably only be able to go to community college, to explain the difference between her hopes and expectations:

Umm, I'm not really sure if I would graduate from a university—because how expensive tuition is right now, but I think that if I had the money and my grades are good and everything, I think I could make it.

Figure 3: Highest Educational Level to Which Respondents Aspire, Compared to Highest Educational Level Respondents Expect to Achieve



Source: Responses to NWLC/MALDEF survey of selected Latina high school students, 2008.

Research has shown that Latino students, while holding high beliefs in the utility of school and the value of education, generally have lower levels than their peers of “self-concept” of—or confidence in—their ability to do well in school.²¹ And although, according to one study, Latina girls start off in school with levels of self-esteem higher than those of their peer groups, they have the largest decline in

self-esteem as they progress to young adulthood.²² Perhaps related is the startling statistic that Latinas have the highest rates of suicide and depression among their peer groups.²³

Challenges Facing the Latino Community Help to Explain This Disconnect.

I. Latino Students Face Barriers Related to Poverty, Immigration, and Language Ability.

A. Poverty deeply affects Latino students' academic achievement.

The link between poverty and dropout risk has been well-documented.²⁴ And Latino children are far more likely to live in poverty than White children.²⁵ In 2007, 28.6% of Hispanic children lived in poverty, compared to only 10.1% of White, non-Hispanic children.²⁶ Additionally, Latino children

are more likely than White children to lack adequate health care, vision care, and stable and secure housing.²⁷

Poverty limits educational opportunities for Latino children in numerous ways.

- ▶ **Lower levels of preparation for school.** For a variety of reasons, Latino children are less likely than their African-American and White peers to participate in early childhood education programs.²⁸ As a result, Latino children often enter first grade with reading levels behind those of their White peers.²⁹ Moreover, these achievement gaps are durable. Where students are grouped according to performance, Latino students may be “tracked” in lower levels throughout primary school and into secondary school.³⁰
- ▶ **Schools with fewer resources.** The schools many Latinos attend are more crowded, have higher teacher turnover, and tend to have teachers with less experience.³¹ These schools’ limited resources may restrict Latino students’ access to rigorous academic programs or after-school enrichment activities.³²
- ▶ **Frequent moves to different schools.** Possibly because of the precarious economic situation in which their parents often find themselves,³³ Latino students (particularly those from migrant worker families)³⁴ are more likely than children of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to move and change schools. This pattern can have a negative effect on achievement and has been correlated with higher dropout rates among Latino students.³⁵
- ▶ **Inadequate community supports.** Latinos are more likely to live in low-income communities that lack important resources such as playgrounds, parks, and after-school programs.³⁶ All of these factors take a toll on Latino students and can affect their ability to be successful in school.³⁷

B. Immigration status creates instability for many Latino students.

In general, students born outside the United States have a higher risk of dropping out than their native-born peers.³⁸ In 2005, 11% of Latino children were foreign-born, compared to 2% of African-American children and 1% of White children.³⁹ Our research also supports this link. Of the 335 Latina girls who responded to our written survey, 90 were foreign-born and had come to the U.S. as children. Twenty-two percent of the girls who were foreign-born had considered dropping out, compared to 16% of the girls who responded that they were born in the U.S. However, research has shown that even second- and third-generation Latino youth drop out at higher rates than White students, demonstrating that Latino students’ immigration status alone does not necessarily explain the barriers they face.⁴⁰

It is also important to note that the Latino student population is increasingly U.S.-born: 91% of Latino students are U.S. citizens.⁴¹ While many students therefore do not face problems related to their own immigration status, an estimated 3 million of these U.S. born children have parents who are undocumented.⁴² Children who are undocumented or who live in mixed-status families face a great deal of emotional stress, which undoubtedly takes a toll on their education, and may also encounter financial or legal barriers to pursuing higher education.

1. Undocumented status creates anxiety and uncertainty.

In our focus groups, a number of girls who revealed that their families do not have legal status expressed anxiety about being unauthorized to live in the United States. One ninth-grade student explained that her family's situation causes her a great deal of stress, as she worries that they "could be deported any minute." Her mother encourages her to focus on school and prepare for college despite the situation; the family hopes to obtain legal status by the time she is ready to enter college.

In another focus group, we spoke with a Latina girl who dropped out of school when she was in ninth grade. When asked to explain the reasons she left school, she said that it had been a very tough year for her, in part because her mother—the primary caretaker who asked her about school and encouraged her academically—had been "sent back to Guatemala." Gradually, she stopped attending school altogether.

A number of the adults we surveyed and interviewed confirmed that immigration status is an obstacle for Latina students. An after-school program staff member noted, for example, that:

Sometimes kids don't always know that they're undocumented, in middle school they are starting to figure it out, but they don't really understand—it's a hard thing to comprehend. . . . [But some kids] are worried about being called by immigration—they are sometimes not allowed to answer the door and stuff in case it's a raid. They are living in fear.

2. Undocumented status poses real financial challenges.

Immigration status can also create significant financial barriers to future educational and career opportunities. Undocumented Latino students cannot qualify for federal financial aid for higher education and cannot legally get a job even if they graduate from college.

One girl we interviewed said:

Oh yeah, like I've seen many of my friends, they're really into school but they had to quit because of their immigration status. They have to work and they don't have the money to keep on going, and the colleges won't accept them—it's more expensive and they don't have the money.

Other students may be discouraged from graduating from high school because they realize that getting a diploma will not enable them to get the steadier, higher-paying jobs that require not only a high school diploma but also proof of legal status. A high school teacher in an agricultural area commented:

A lot of kids have a hard time because they feel like what's the point, I work in the field now and I'm going to end up working in the field, because they can't get other, better jobs because they don't have immigration status. These kids are aware, they know exactly what's going on—the problem is that the mainstream community does not understand.

C. Language barriers limit educational opportunities for Latino students.

Many Latino students—and their parents—face barriers related to limited English proficiency. In 2005, 19% of Latino students spoke English with difficulty, compared to only 1% of Black and White students.⁴³ These students are more likely to fall behind and thus face particular dropout risks.⁴⁴

Students we interviewed confirmed these challenges and revealed their practical consequences. One girl explained her decision to drop out of a traditional school and enroll in a GED program by saying that she had felt constantly behind and struggled to pass her classes because she was still learning English. In contrast, another girl who left her traditional high school blamed her school for forcing her to remain in an ESL program, even when she felt she no longer needed that support.

II. Latino Parents Face Barriers to Involvement in Their Children's Education.

Students with parents who are actively involved in their education are more likely to do well in school.⁴⁵ For Latinas, too, parental support has been correlated with school engagement.⁴⁶ But there are numerous barriers that limit Latino parents' involvement in their children's schools.

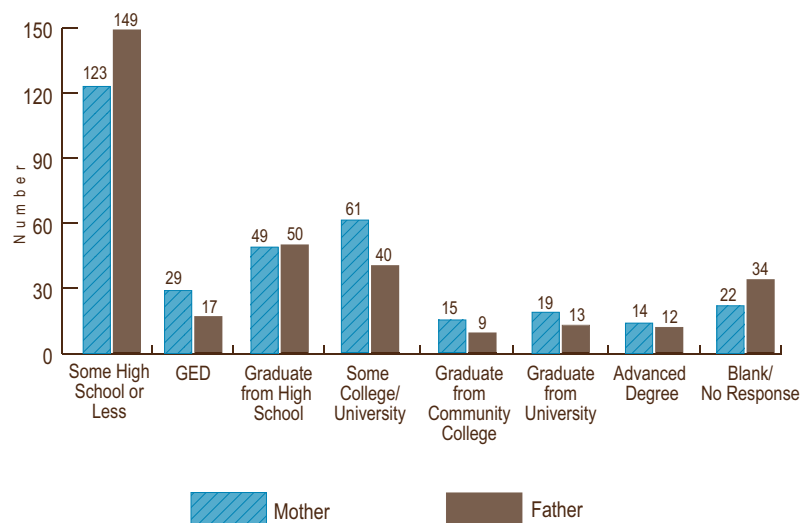
A. Many Latino parents have low levels of formal education.

Many Latino parents do not have high levels of education and/or were not educated in this country. A number of studies have found a correlation between the education level and income of parents, their level of involvement in their child's education, and the achievement outcomes of their children.⁴⁷ In addition to barriers posed by their own low levels of education, some Latino parents may be inhibited from involvement in their children's school lives because they lack the cultural capital (knowledge of how the system works) and social capital (access to important networks) critical to navigating the U.S. school system and advocating for their children.⁴⁸

We spoke with the director of a Latina mentoring program, who explained:

I think the core group of young ladies we work with are first generation or have migrant parents and they have a different relationship with the school. It takes some education to get [the parents] to advocate, demand a better teacher, the

Figure 4: Highest Level of Educational Attainment by Parents of Respondents



Source: NWLC/MALDEF survey of selected Latina high school students, 2008.

right class, getting them to understand that that's possible, that you can meet with the counselor, file a grievance, whatever. I always hear from the girls that they have bad teachers, or they're not getting enough attention or whatever, and it's something that if the parents knew how to be more engaged with the school, the principal, the counselor or even the teacher, taking that initiative and going to that school, [it might be better].

On a question regarding the education level of each of their parents, 149 of the girls who responded to the question (about 50%) noted that their father had less than a high school degree, and 123 of them (about 40%) indicated that their mother had less than a high school diploma.⁴⁹ This second figure may be particularly important because the education level of a child's mother has been shown to be closely correlated with student success across all ethnicities.⁵⁰ See Figure 4.

Our interviews with Latina students made it clear that their parents' lack of education and lack of experience with the U.S. education system made it difficult for them to be effective advocates for their children. Extended work hours, language barriers, and economic constraints also limit a parent's role in offering academic encouragement or assistance with homework.⁵¹ One girl we interviewed expressed the feeling that she was on her own when it came to her plans for the future and her school life, in part because of her parents' work commitments:

[My mother is] usually working which makes me feel like I'm really alone. Like I feel like my parents are always working, and I think that's another reason why I feel so alone in my school subjects and stuff. . . . [My mother is] a housekeeper so she has her own hours so sometimes she works until 9 at night so I barely get to see her sometimes.

Another girl explained: "My mom, she'll help me with what she knows, but she doesn't really have the education that I have—she didn't finish middle school." Some girls said that their parents want them to succeed but lack the knowledge necessary to actively guide their daughters:

I feel like my parents are always working, and I think that's another reason why I feel so alone in my school subjects.

[My mother is] [n]ot really [involved] too much. She doesn't know too much about it but she tells me I don't have to work as long as I'm in school. She wants me to go to college. She wants me to do better than she did.

Others suggested that their parents were able to build awareness of their daughters' school-related needs through the help of a parent-daughter college access program:

[My mom is] starting to learn, at first she was kinda new here but now she communicates more and helps me with my school more and understands my problems better [as a result of this program].

B. Many Latino parents feel unwelcome at their child's school.

Latino parents tend to encounter more barriers and unwelcoming experiences at school than do non-Latino parents.⁵² Latino parents also face practical obstacles to getting more involved in their children's schools. Several students told us that their monolingual Spanish-speaking parents do not attend PTA meetings because those meetings are held only in English. In addition, many schools fail to schedule parent meetings at times that take into account the needs of parents who work evening hours or inflexible schedules. One staff member at a school in a rural area with a large population of immigrant agricultural workers explained:

For the most part, [Latino parental involvement here is] extremely limited. A lot of [the students'] parents have brought them here specifically to get an education, but they don't realize what that means or how it happens, and they don't speak the language well. They are probably working 15-20 hours a day in the field to pay rent. . . . If not that, it's two or three menial jobs. So they don't have the hours to put in to help their kids and get involved in their education.

III. Latinas and Latinos Face Some Similar Challenges at School.

A. Concerns about school safety limit school engagement.

Latino students, along with African-American students, are significantly more likely than White students to report that they do not feel safe at school. In 2005, 10% of all Latino students reported that they were afraid of being attacked on campus or on the way to school, compared to 4% of White students.⁵³ Feeling unsafe at school has been correlated with declining academic performance, skipping school, and dropping out.⁵⁴

Our written survey asked respondents to rate how safe they felt at school, and only 38% reported that they felt "very safe." The majority of students said they felt less than "very safe" at school. In a follow-up question, girls who said that they felt less than "very safe" cited the following reasons: gangs, bullying, fights, unsafe neighborhoods, and general fears about security at and around school.

Although the staff we interviewed believe that their students do feel safe at school, the students themselves appear to feel differently. At a focus group we conducted at a high school with a strong presence of security officers patrolling the hallways, girls responded with a chorus of “No!” when asked if they felt safe in their school. One participant responded: “No one feels safe at this school.” Girls mentioned fights, gang presence, and drugs as some of the things that affected their safety.

B. Disciplinary issues, poor academic performance, and frequent absences increase Latina and Latino dropout rates.

Students who are disciplined for misbehaving at school, students who have poor grades, students who are retained a grade (“held back”), and students who believe their peers see them as troublemakers all have higher odds of dropping out.⁵⁵ Latino students are more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students,⁵⁶ and to be retained a grade.⁵⁷ Although Latinas are not suspended as often as Latinos, they are suspended at a higher rate than White or Asian girls.⁵⁸

A recent study of North Carolina students highlighted the impact of disciplinary issues on dropout risk. The study found that although more boys than girls overall dropped out in that state for disciplinary reasons, more twelfth grade Hispanic females left for disciplinary reasons than any other group of students.⁵⁹ And while disciplinary rates for both White and Black girls decreased over time, they increased for Hispanic females. Even though Hispanic females had the lowest rates of leaving school due to discipline among all groups of ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade dropouts, the number of Hispanic females leaving because of disciplinary issues in twelfth grade rose to over 14%, higher than the 11% of Hispanic males who left for the same reason that year.⁶⁰

Responses to our survey also indicated a link between disciplinary and academic problems and dropout. Of the students responding to our written survey who reported they had ever failed a class, been suspended from school, or held back a grade, around one-third had thought of dropping out of school. By contrast, only about one-tenth of the students who reported that they had never experienced such problems in school had considered dropping out.

Our survey also bolstered the finding that high rates of absenteeism are correlated with dropout rates.⁶¹ Of the 51 students who said that they typically had nine or more absences per semester, 30 had considered dropping out (58.8%). In comparison, of the 139 students who reported that they had only one or two absences per semester, nine of those—a much smaller proportion (6.5%)—had considered dropping out of school.

The idea that you're not supposed to move out until you get married limits your academic ambitions.

Latinas Face Particular Challenges Related to the Intersection of Their Ethnicity and Gender.

I. Discrimination and Gender Stereotypes Undermine Latinas' Educational Opportunities.

A. Latinas face cultural stereotypes and a lack of role models in their daily lives.

All girls, including Latinas, receive subtle and not-so-subtle messages about women's roles in society. But gender and ethnic stereotypes can negatively affect Latinas' educational performance in particular.⁶²

Stereotypes may portray Latinas as submissive underachievers and caretakers, and too often these can be reinforced—albeit perhaps unintentionally—by family, school personnel, and the media.⁶³ Because of these stereotypes, many “low-income Latinas do not foresee their possibilities for doing well in school and pursuing post-secondary education or careers, and so leave school and start a family.”⁶⁴ More egalitarian views about gender roles, on the other hand, have been found to contribute positively to Latinas' self-image and self-esteem and also to predict higher academic achievement and grades.⁶⁵

1. Latinas are influenced by family and societal expectations.

While some of the girls in our study said they did not notice a difference between their parents' hopes for them and their brothers, other participants noted that parents do have differing expectations for their sons and daughters. A staff member from an after-school program, for example, said:

My dad's side of the family is Latino so I've seen personally it's just a thing that's there. Even female teachers are not given much respect by boys in the classroom, and the girls aren't given respect by the boys. [There's a] hierarchy, [it's] most apparent with siblings—I had a girl in my class who had 6 siblings and she was being encouraged to be a dental tech or something with hair, and she said she couldn't go to college because, she said, my parents can only afford to send the boys to college.

A high school counselor for at-risk students said that the attitudes of some Latinas about high school and post-secondary options stem from their parents' gender bias:

I think I see where Hispanics usually tend to as far as going to college. Some, not all, come from families that think the female role is staying home and not going to college and having a career. Staying home and having a family is first and foremost.

Similarly, a girl who is currently in college talked about feeling limited by what she felt were patriarchal constraints promoted by cultural norms:

For example, the idea that you're not supposed to move out of your home until you get married . . . [t]his limits your academic ambitions and forces you to settle to attend a school close to home that may or may not be the best choice for you.

Some girls whom we interviewed demonstrated a determination to prove the stereotypes wrong. Some are motivated to try harder precisely to avoid the future that others envision for them. For example, one student, asked whether there was anyone in particular whom she relied on for support or advice about school, said:

Not really. I take my family's experiences and my friends' experiences and I set that in my mind to not be like that—like not have kids or get pregnant—and no one in my family has graduated from high school.

In too many instances, however, Latina girls internalize these gender stereotypes. A staff member at an after-school program for Latinas in middle school noted that the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the Latino community can cause some Latinas to “get the message that their job is to be pretty and have babies.”

In addition, an after-school program coordinator observed that she hears about Latina girls “getting into violent relationships and being abused by the boyfriend in high school, verbally and physically.” In fact, in a 2003 survey by the CDC, 9.2% of Latina high school students reported that they had been victims of physical dating violence. While this percentage is less than the percentage of Black girls who report dating violence (14%), it exceeds the rate at which White girls experience such violence (7.5%).⁶⁶

2. Many Latinas lack role models to inspire and advise them on reaching educational and career goals.

According to some of the school and program staff we interviewed, one of the primary challenges facing Latinas in school today is the absence of female role models or inspiring influences. For example, the director of a mentoring program for Latinas said that the absence of good role models profoundly undermines Latinas' self-esteem:

One of the things I see all the time [is] a lack of pride, even [in] the concept of Latina. In some communities where they have been migrant

workers and they play a certain role in that community, and they never [have] seen themselves as the professional or the doctor in that community. That really plays down on them and they don't see themselves doing that. Programming and Latina empowerment and education really teaches them that and changes that. Someone in front of them who looks like them and came from where they came from, that makes it a lot more real.

A staff member from an after-school program, who previously taught at a middle school, also commented on the importance of role models:

I was working with eighth graders in particular and their families. A lot of them don't believe that they can make it. They don't have a lot of positive role models and positive influence. Girls are expected to go to work and help out with their families. Or get married and have babies. . . . Even in the eighth grade we had about four or five girls go in for pregnancy tests.

In our interviews, many girls said that neither their parents nor others in their families had gone to college, so they lacked an educational role model and also someone to go to for guidance within the family. Roughly 40% of the girls we surveyed indicated that their mothers either had not finished or had not even attended high school. And Census data show that in comparison to Whites, Latinos are far less likely to have parents who went to college: while almost four in ten White children have parents who attended college, only one in ten Latino children do.⁶⁷

As one teacher explained, “get[ting Latinas] into the real world” is key to giving them hope for the future and role models with whom they can identify:

I guess sometimes I see that they realize they have an option and that they can go forward and graduate . . . by giving them actual experience and taking them out in the community and have other people tell them. We connect with the tri-city Hispanic Chamber [of Commerce] and they see other people making it and they see a connection, then they have more drive.

Peer influences are also critical. More than half of our survey respondents reported that they had friends who had dropped out. For those trying to stay in school and succeed, the loss of part of a peer network can be discouraging and make it even harder to achieve academic goals.

Aside from the motivational benefits, there also is a strong practical need for educational and career role models. Many students we interviewed lacked any understanding of their options for post-secondary education or the prerequisites to attain it, much less first-hand knowledge of the many benefits of attending college.

B. Latinas face the intersection of ethnicity and sex discrimination—and related barriers—at school.

Despite the prohibitions of federal law,⁶⁸ Latinas also face gender and ethnicity discrimination—and sometimes the intersection of those two types of discrimination—by teachers, school staff, and their peers. When teachers and others in school demonstrate a lack of cultural sensitivity or rely on ethnic, racial, or gender stereotypes, student engagement and learning is hindered, increasing the risk that the students subject to discrimination will do poorly, fall behind, and drop out.⁶⁹

1. Latinas face explicit discrimination based on their ethnicity.

The school and program staff we interviewed cited incidents of discrimination as barriers to Latinas' success. A school employee assigned to work with at-risk students said that discrimination is “a challenge for the girls, they don't feel as comfortable in the classroom setting maybe. Racism they feel.” She then shared this story:

One student brought in a worksheet that was racist, and I gave it to an administrator. It came out of a workbook—it had a picture of a Mexican family with a sombrero, donkey, and wagon, and you had to complete math problems and figure out the puzzle with a saying. The student came in and said, “[Counselor's name], how racist is this?” I took it to the administrators and told them that their teachers may not see it as a problem but this student did. They did not realize until they saw it.

Eighty-seven of the students who responded to our written survey and several of the girls we interviewed stated that they had been treated differently at school because of their ethnicity. One student reported that a teacher declined to acknowledge her complaint that a classmate had called her “a wet-back.” As a result, in addition to feeling targeted by her classmate's use of the epithet, she felt isolated and unsupported. The student explained:

I had already felt like I was maybe out of place—like people had nicer stuff than me and they made me feel like nothing compared to them, the

I have a lot of people tell me “you're going to end up pregnant.”

way they were and stuff. It made me feel like not confident with myself, made me put myself down Later I felt like if I had some questions I wouldn't even approach [that teacher]...it really hurt me a lot.

2. Latinas face unwelcoming school environments.

Beyond explicitly discriminatory treatment, Latinas often face policies that create an unwelcoming atmosphere at school. Because feelings of alienation and marginalization have been linked to dropout,⁷⁰ enabling students to embrace their ethnic identity in a welcoming, multicultural school environment may be integral to Latinas' academic achievement.

A number of students we interviewed reported not feeling comfortable speaking Spanish with friends at school, and some felt unable to embrace their own identities as Latinas with pride, particularly when the school they attended was predominantly White or African-American. Some students also reported being prohibited by their teachers from speaking Spanish at school; one survey respondent said she was suspended for doing so.

Girls at one high school felt disappointed that there is only one club focused on Latino students, even though Latinos, and primarily bilingual Latinos, comprise about 25% of the school population. Some of the students also complained that their schools and curricula reflected a lack of appreciation for Latino heritage—noting, for example, that their school sponsored several activities and assignments for African-American History month, while offering no assignments and only one activity in recognition of Hispanic Heritage month.

3. For Latinas, gender stereotypes exacerbate discrimination based on ethnicity.

Latinas report that they often find that they are subject to stereotypes and expectations at school that relate to their status as women in a traditionally patriarchal society. Gender stereotypes limit the range of “possible selves” that girls can envision becoming because they may internalize the images or expectations that they see around them.⁷¹ As researchers have noted, for example: “Pregnancy, housework, and stereotypes of ‘women’s work’ and career options have an impact on girls’ possible selves in ways that differ from boys’ possible selves.”⁷²

Our respondents told us stories that illustrated how the intersection of ethnicity and gender create enhanced barriers for them. Girls in one of our focus groups, for example, reported that a non-Latino teacher in the school asked a ninth grade Latina student sitting with her friends in the cafeteria: “Why aren’t you pregnant yet?” One of the girls we interviewed who was the oldest of several siblings and often shouldered parenting duties, stated: “I have a lot of people tell me ‘you’re going to end up pregnant.’”

A college student who responded to our survey wrote that she felt she was treated differently as a Latina when she was in high school:

Generally, academic expectations are lower. You are supposed to get married and have kids and not set high academic goals for yourself. For

example, at one point when I told a teacher I was heading away to college, he said he gave me two years before I was married and pregnant.

Even those who are successful at school feel the pressure of their teachers' assumptions and diminished expectations. Another student who is currently in college stated:

I did well in high school. . . . I think that for that reason staff at the high school treated me as if I was better than my other Latina peers. Instead of feeling good, it felt unfair because I knew the staff expected less of me (as a Latina) and that was the reason for their better treatment. . . . I went through high school knowing I wasn't having the same experience as my peers (they were tracked, left to linger without getting any real support for improvement). I was the "token" Latina achiever and thereby treated more like my White peers.

Other students reported that they were treated differently by their peers, particularly where they were one of only a few Latinas in an environment dominated by White or African-American students. This peer discrimination, too, can turn students off to school. As one student who attended a mostly-White school explained:

Being Latina, I felt so out of place in middle school. . . . And I never liked talking about my family, my background. . . . I just didn't really want to be at school.

4. Some Latinas face sexual harassment at school.

Research has shown that girls are more likely than boys to feel sexually harassed at school, and girls are more likely to be impacted negatively by the harassment.⁷³ In addition to suffering psychologically, girls who are victims of sexual harassment in general are more likely than boys to report not wanting to go to school, trying to change seats in class to avoid a harasser, or not being able to pay attention or participate as much in class.⁷⁴ These patterns can contribute to poor academic performance and eventually lead a student to drop out.⁷⁵

Despite the fact that the vast majority of girls responding to our survey said they had never been sexually harassed at school, 20 girls reported having been touched offensively or harassed verbally while at school. Any instances of sexual harassment must be taken seriously by schools.⁷⁶ Considering that incidents of sexual harassment often go unreported, more research may be appropriate to evaluate the true extent of sexual harassment of Latinas in school.

5. Latinas face barriers to entry into traditionally male fields.

Engaging students in good career and technical education programs can reduce the risk that they will drop out by highlighting for them the relevance of education to their lives and career potential. But girls generally are vastly underrepresented in training for higher-paying fields that are nontraditional for their gender, and some research indicates that Latina students are frequently steered into career and technical education programs that prepare them for traditionally female occupations like cosme-

Being Latina, I felt so out of place in middle school. I just didn't really want to be at school.

tology and child care.⁷⁷ These patterns not only deny Latinas the opportunity to develop their potential, but also shut them out of male-dominated jobs, which tend to offer higher pay and better benefits than traditionally female jobs.

A middle school counselor for at-risk students described the career and technical education opportunities at her school, including welding, and we asked her whether girls were encouraged to take welding. She said:

There was one girl that we tried to encourage and she wouldn't go . . . they actually recommended her for the program. They can make so much more money than cosmetology or whatever . . . girls that go into the field. [She] thought that if I go to that program what if I get paid bunk because I'm the only woman. I can just imagine. You already have to have tough skin. She's an eighth grader. They couldn't convince her to go.

Unfortunately, the counselor did not describe any efforts to convince a set of girls to enroll, to avoid the burden on the student of being the only girl in the program.

Latina high school students may end up “steered into gender-specific jobs with minimal career or income advancement.”⁷⁸ One sample of Mexican American students in rural areas found that the number one career choice for ninth grade Latinas was cosmetology, and for boys, automotive repair.⁷⁹ In our interviews as well, particularly those of students who do not participate in college access or mentoring programs, cosmetology was frequently cited by girls as their career aspiration.

II. Pregnancy and Parenting Responsibilities Significantly Limit Latinas' Educational Opportunities.

Latina students face significant challenges to balancing school and family responsibilities, particularly because the rate of teen pregnancy among Latinas is so high. These responsibilities can substantially heighten the dropout risks for Latinas.

A. Latinas have higher rates of teen pregnancy than other groups of girls.

Many of the girls we interviewed reported that they knew or were friends with girls who had become pregnant. This is not surprising given that 53% of Latina teens—nearly twice the national average—

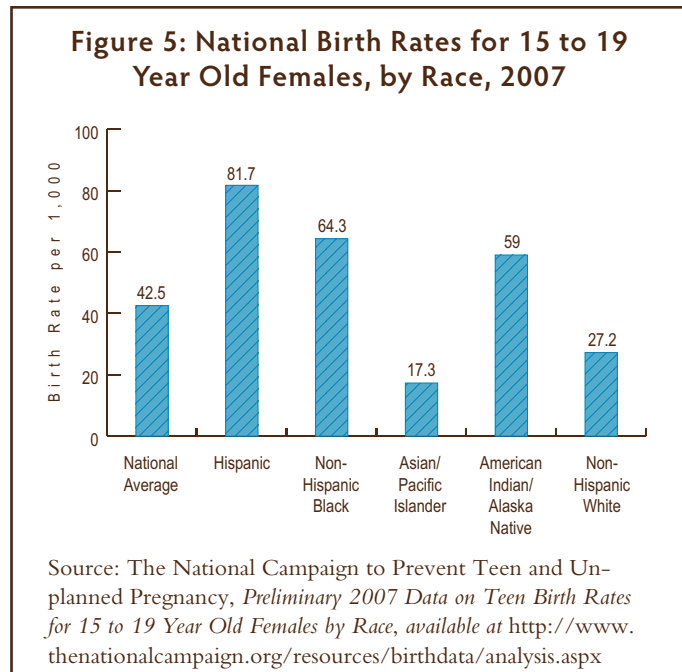
get pregnant at least once before age 20.⁸⁰ As of 2004, Latinas had the highest teen pregnancy rate of any major racial/ethnic group in the country.⁸¹ And while the nation’s overall teen pregnancy rate declined between 2002 and 2004, for Latina teens it increased slightly between 2003 and 2004.⁸² Also, the *birth* rate for Latina teens is twice the national average and higher than that for any other subgroup of girls.⁸³ See Figure 5.

The reasons for this heightened incidence of teen pregnancy are complex.⁸⁴ Perhaps most significantly, the Latina girls we interviewed generally do not have access to comprehensive, medically accurate information about pregnancy prevention—either at home or at school. Many girls reported that they did not get information from their parents about sex or the risk of getting pregnant, or did so only in an indirect manner. One girl, when asked whether her parents have talked to her about sex, said: “In a way they have but they use other words...they say look at your cousin or something like that. They don’t necessarily tell you, they just tell you in other words.”

Most of the girls we interviewed said they did not talk to their parents about sex at all. Potentially more hopeful findings from a recent poll conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy indicate that a majority of the Latino students polled (both boys and girls) said they have talked with their parents about sex.⁸⁵ However, the poll results do not indicate how extensive those conversations were nor what specific topics those conversations covered. Their findings did note, however, that only 49% of respondents said their parents had ever talked to them about contraception.⁸⁶ This issue warrants further analysis, as improved communication between Latino parents and their children will help maximize efforts to prevent teen pregnancy. Additionally, the National Campaign’s polling data suggest that gender stereotypes may come into play and hinder girls’ access to information from their parents about sex and contraception; 73% of Latino teens who responded felt that parents send one message about sex to their sons and a different message altogether to their daughters.⁸⁷

As for sex education in school, respondents’ answers to our questions reflected the various policies and practices of the states in which they live. One counselor in a state that requires schools to use an abstinence-only curriculum, when asked why so many Latina students become parents, said that the problem is a lack of education about what really works to prevent pregnancy. For example, she said, a couple of girls told her that they used marijuana as birth control—they heard that “if a man smokes marijuana, it ruins his sperm,” so they believed that if they had sex with someone who had just smoked a joint, they could not get pregnant.

Another counselor described abstinence-only sex education classes, explaining that the instructors are “not allowed to talk about contraception . . . [they] just try to instill abstinence and alternative ways



to express their feelings,” and the students are taught about the risk of sexually transmitted illnesses. When asked whether she thought that program was working, she said: “Honestly, no. We need to talk more about contraceptives and what Planned Parenthood stresses, but we cannot.” She added that only the students in the school’s teen parent program—who, obviously, already have gotten pregnant—are given family planning information; those sessions are coordinated by the on-site child care center for the students’ children.

In contrast, the director of an after-school program for Latina girls in a state that offers comprehensive sex education noted the ways in which schools can help Latinas to avoid pregnancy: “I know the high school near my house has a clinic with contraception. You need it because in some places you go to the pharmacy and get a condom and they look at you weird.” When a couple of seniors in her program got pregnant, she started a teen wellness session, using a video from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to start a discussion among the girls about their future and the choices they wanted to make.

B. Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities pose major barriers to completing high school.

Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities significantly affect girls’ graduation rates. In a recent Gates Foundation survey, close to one-half of female dropouts said that becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school, and one-third of female dropouts said it was a major factor.⁸⁸ In our survey, 90 of the girls, or about 27%, said they had friends who had dropped out of school when they got pregnant. And even if students manage to stay in school while parenting one child, their risks of dropout are substantially increased if they have a second or subsequent pregnancy.⁸⁹ Moreover, statistics show that only 2% of all teens who have a baby before age 18 ever graduate from college.⁹⁰

Pregnant and parenting students’ chances of success are harmed by a lack of support from their schools, active discouragement or discrimination by school personnel, and inferior alternative education programs.⁹¹ Although discrimination on the basis of pregnancy violates Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972—the federal civil rights law that bars sex discrimination in school⁹²—too many schools are either unaware of⁹³ or fail to comply with their legal obligations. Indeed, while most of the pregnant and parenting students in our survey did not report experiencing pregnancy discrimination,⁹⁴ several of them mentioned policies or conduct on the part of their schools that would seem to violate Title IX. For example, a number of them said they were steered into alternative programs when they got pregnant, and in some cases those programs were inferior to their regular high schools.

Indeed, pregnancy discrimination is still all too common in schools across the country. Too often, pregnant students are forced to attend dead-end schools that offer parenting classes but no opportunities for graduation or preparation for post-secondary education or careers.⁹⁵ In some places, pregnant students are told that they must return to school within one week of giving birth, regardless of their physicians’ recommendations, and that they may not make up work missed during their absences.⁹⁶ They are barred from running for homecoming court and joining honor societies⁹⁷—activities that encourage student engagement in school. And they are told that they must bring doctors’ notes authorizing their participation in activities—even though no such requirement is imposed on other students who face temporarily disabling conditions.⁹⁸

Even beyond overt discrimination, schools also fail to give pregnant students the supports they need to maximize their chances of staying in school. According to one study of Latinas who had dropped out after having a baby, many left school because they were not given the resources or support mechanisms to help them balance school and raising a child.⁹⁹ Specifically, the challenges most often identified by pregnant and parenting students and their advocates are the lack of access to and availability of affordable child care and the lack of transportation for the mother and child to and from school/child care. These logistical hurdles can, as a practical matter, make it virtually impossible for a teen mother to attend and finish school.

Academic and attendance challenges can be especially problematic for girls who get pregnant at a very young age. A middle school counselor for at-risk students explained:

Girls who get pregnant in middle school just don't come back even though we encourage them to come back . . . We have some getting older, 16 or 17 and still in middle school, [who] want to catch up to their right grade but when they're behind, it's that much more work and they won't let them get to a higher grade level unless they pass the grade level they're in. Some have attendance issues; one student I have doesn't show up a lot which of course affects her ability to do well and pass.

Our research contradicts the argument sometimes advanced that providing enhanced support to pregnant and parenting students will lead other girls to want to become pregnant. The girls we interviewed, many of whom have seen friends or classmates get pregnant and struggle or drop out, displayed an awareness of the difficulty of staying in school and having a baby.¹⁰⁰ For example, one young woman stated: “I just don’t want to end up like that right now.” And an assistant superintendent who started a promising program in her school district providing supports for pregnant and parenting students in the context of their neighborhood high school said:

I want . . . to dispel the myth that [providing these services in the same school setting] will make other girls want to get pregnant. It hasn't. And it's very cost effective.

On the other hand, some schools may be sending the wrong message to their female students: they celebrate students’ pregnancies while providing insufficient support to keep those students in school. One teacher we interviewed, for example, noted that her school staff throws baby showers for the girls who get pregnant (many of whom are Latina), and suggested that instead of—or in addition to—those events, the staff should throw parties to celebrate a girl’s graduation or acceptance into college, to emphasize that there are other ways for them to be valued and acknowledged.

III. Other Family Responsibilities Can Compromise Latinas' Educational Success.

A. Family responsibilities may fall heavily on Latinas.

Even when they do not have parenting obligations of their own, research suggests that many Latinas—more than their male peers—are expected to act as caretakers for younger siblings or elderly

relatives.¹⁰¹ This may be, at least in part, the result of enduring stereotypes of Latina women as primarily mothers and family caretakers.¹⁰²

Many girls we interviewed talked about having to help their parents by providing child care for their younger siblings or by getting a job. One girl, for example, pointing out that her parents “sometimes struggle to pay bills” and work long hours, confirmed that she has to be a “second mom” to her younger sisters.

On the other hand, many girls who want to help out said that their parents would not let them give up school to help with family responsibilities. But even for these girls, the tension between their own (and their parents’) desire that they finish school and the perception that they are not fulfilling their family responsibilities can create stressors that can hamper their academic achievement. One girl with several younger siblings noted:

Yeah sometimes I do want to do that, I just want to take a year off from school [and work] so I can help them to get whatever they need but my mom tells me no, that I need to go to school—and I get mad sometimes 'cause they need shoes or something and I can't help them.

Another student mentioned:

My parents were getting really stressed out with the bills, they weren't able to pay the bills and I felt like I should help them out. I used to babysit and I would come home and put the money in my mom and dad's wallets 'cause they were broke, or I would do my own lunch. I really wanted to work but they were like “no, it's ok.”

Many of the school and program staff members we surveyed and interviewed had similar observations about the effects of a family’s financial situation on the responsibilities assigned to Latina students and their ability to stay in school. For example, one teacher shared this story:

We have a family, the mother has 11 children and we have two of her girls right now [and] there have been times when the girls had to stay home, and [they] quite frankly said that they were asked to stay home and babysit, their mom said that's birth control for the girls. [These families] fall through the cracks in getting child care—they are quite poor, or if they have a job, the state grant for child care is not enough to cover the cost.

While strong family bonds can support and motivate Latina students in pursuing academic goals, “The actual fulfillment of specific family [obligations] can be detrimental to academic performance.”¹⁰³ The pressures of fulfilling both student and family roles might force girls into “ranking their more numerous role obligations and expectations” and to “assign (through social pressure) a lower priority to the student role than do boys.”¹⁰⁴

B. Family responsibilities can interfere with school engagement.

Where they shoulder the burden of family responsibilities, Latinas can find it hard to maintain levels of engagement in school, and particularly to participate in extracurricular activities, after-school programs or sports. Caretaking responsibilities can, in some cases, also lead to repeated absences from school.

In general, Latino students are less likely than White students to participate in athletics and other extra-curricular activities despite showing similar levels of interest.¹⁰⁵ This increases their dropout risk, because it robs students of the involvement in activities and sports that can help to build relationships and a sense of engagement at school.¹⁰⁶ And for minority students who otherwise feel excluded at school, extracurricular activities can provide “a positive support network” and “a culture of support and acceptance.”¹⁰⁷

When it comes to sports, girls as a whole already are underrepresented in high school athletics,¹⁰⁸ and Latinas’ involvement is even lower. As compared to White students, Latinas and African-American girls have lower sports participation rates, even though parents of Latinas were slightly more likely than parents of White girls to say that their daughters were very interested in sports.¹⁰⁹

Several girls we interviewed mentioned that they would like to be involved in sports or other extracurricular activities after school, but are unable because of family resources.¹¹⁰ And as expected, our survey responses demonstrated a correlation between involvement in school activities and staying in school.¹¹¹

The girls we interviewed who do participate in extracurricular activities noted that they felt better and more engaged in school as a result. One girl said her activities helped her to feel more involved in school, so “you kinda forget about other stuff that could actually get you to drop out.” Another student noted that swimming every day after school didn’t necessarily improve her grades, but it “kinda helps take all the stress away.”

Recommendations For Schools and Policymakers

This section focuses on proposals that can help to further identify and address the particular challenges faced by Latina students, to improve Latinas’ high school graduation rates, and to encourage Latinas to pursue further education. Many of the recommendations are likely to help both boys and girls, and some may help address challenges faced by students of other ethnicities as well. Given the overlap and interplay between all of the above-discussed factors, the dropout prevention strategies most likely to be successful for Latinas will be comprehensive and will address a variety of issues.

1. Invest in the future of Latino children.

Earlier this year, in a speech before the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, President Obama stressed the importance of providing America’s children with high-quality early learning programs, and acknowledged the heightened needs of Latino children in this regard: “[S]ome [children] are wasting away their most formative years in bad programs. That includes the one-fourth of all children who are Hispanic, and who will drive America’s workforce of tomorrow, but who are less likely to have been enrolled in an early childhood education program than anyone else.”¹¹²

To mitigate the obstacles that Latino youth—the fastest growing school-age population in the country—face from the outset,

Federal, state, and local policymakers should:

- ▶ **Expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and early education** through increased investments in child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and other early learning initiatives, as well as family literacy programs.
- ▶ **Conduct outreach to all families, including Latino families**, to ensure they are aware of and have access to child care assistance and other early childhood programs. Many Latino families are not aware that such programs exist and that they are eligible for them.
- ▶ **Provide access to education and training for child care providers**, including targeted efforts to reach providers who are Latino or who are serving Latino families.
- ▶ **Expand access to family supports including housing, health care, nutrition assistance, and tax benefits.** To enable Latino students from poor families to focus on school and teen parents to support their children, programs that provide supports to low-income families should be adequately funded. Outreach should be targeted to Latino families, to ensure they can take advantage of benefits for which they are eligible. Officials distributing funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 should carefully consider the needs of Latino children and families and direct funds to programs that will meet those needs.

Unfortunately, state budget shortfalls pose threats to many of these programs.¹¹³ It is critical to the long-term economic well-being of states and our nation as a whole that these important programs be fully funded.

2. Connect Latinas with role models and engage them in goal setting.

Girls with long-term plans or educational aspirations have more hope for the future, are less likely to get pregnant,¹¹⁴ and become more engaged in school and related activities—all factors making it more likely that they will graduate from high school and make it to college. Seeing someone in front of them who looks like them, came from where they come from, and has done well and achieved her career and educational goals can empower students and enhance their possibilities for success. And research has shown that a relationship with a caring adult helps students to stay in school and graduate.

Schools must play a part in connecting students to mentors or role models and facilitating goal setting. Among other things,

Schools should:

- ▶ **Talk early and often with students about their short and long-term aspirations.** For example, school personnel should discuss with all students things like the clubs they want to join, sports they want to play, classes they want to take, how to manage school with family responsibilities and jobs, and college and career goals.

- ▶ **Provide guidance on prerequisites for post-secondary education.** Schools must hire an adequate number of counselors, and they should monitor students' course loads to ensure that post-secondary requirements are met. Teachers should share with students information about their own college experiences.
- ▶ **Expose students to the outside world.** Schools should bring in outside speakers, take the students on field trips and site visits to expose them to post-secondary educational options and possible careers, invite college representatives to school to speak with students and parents, and arrange mentoring partnerships (with local universities, government leaders, and the business community) and student support groups.

Federal, state, and local governments should:

- ▶ **Direct funding to mentoring and other programs** that provide Latina girls with access to good educational and career role models as well as support to meet their goals for higher education. Where these programs exist, they should not be cut to resolve state budget deficit concerns, as some states are now proposing. Fostering the positive growth of young Latinas is vital to the economic health of local communities and to our nation as a whole.
- ▶ **Identify successful programs and provide funding and technical assistance** to enable other schools to replicate those programs.

There has to be some kind of very targeted, very culturally sensitive programming for [Latina students]. It's not one single issue that's preventing them from going on to school. It's not a one shot thing; it's a lot of things, and at the end it comes to being supportive. There has to be someone at school to be there for them, so that they understand this is an opportunity.

—Director of a mentoring program in California

3. Ensure that all students can pursue and are prepared for post-secondary educational opportunities.

In order to compete in the global economy and improve our national prosperity, all students—regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, disability, immigration or migrant status—must have access to a post-secondary education. To that end:

Schools should:

- ▶ **Undertake initiatives to get all students “college ready.”** Evidence from our interviews confirms the need for such programs and the impact they can have. Without better information, support and guidance, many students will not be in a position to pursue post-secondary education, even if they do graduate and find the resources to pay for school.

Congress should:

- ▶ **Fund initiatives designed to get Latina (and, indeed, all) students “college ready”** and give them guidance about pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities.

- ▶ **Enact bills so that hard-working students brought to the United States as children, but who are not yet United States citizens or permanent residents, can have the opportunity to attend college**—with federal financial aid—and to seek employment upon their graduation.
- ▶ **Increase support for students in need to secure a higher education**, such as by increasing the maximum Pell grant amount, making the funding of Pell grants mandatory, and adjusting the award so it keeps pace with inflation.

The U.S. Department of Education should:

- ▶ **Identify programs that are successful at getting students “college ready” and provide funding and technical assistance so they can be expanded and replicated.**
- ▶ **Make sure that students are educated about opportunities to obtain funding for higher education** and how to apply for them.
- ▶ **Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) form** to decrease the burden and confusion involved in applying for financial aid.

4. Ensure that school environments are culturally inclusive and free of race, ethnicity, and gender discrimination.

In the year 2009, there is no excuse for cultural insensitivity and discriminatory conduct in our nation’s public schools, among teachers or students. Teachers must not discriminate, and curricula must not contain or be based on race or sex stereotypes.

Schools should:

- ▶ **Rigorously enforce anti-discrimination policies and refuse to tolerate discriminatory or offensive conduct by teachers or students.** Every student should feel welcome in her school, as well as encouraged and supported by the staff.
- ▶ **Support dual language education for Latino students and for English Language Learners (ELLs) in particular.** Dual-language programs, rather than English as a Second Language (ESL) programs that demand English acquisition as fast as possible, build on the existing linguistic strengths of students and allow them to continue to build on their content knowledge rather than fall behind due to time spent on English acquisition.
- ▶ **Create inclusive, multicultural environments** where programming, activities, and curricula incorporate and value Latino history, culture, and identities. For example, Latino students should be provided with opportunities in school, such as in clubs and activities, to speak Spanish and learn about their heritage.
- ▶ **Offer quality after-school programs and summer enrichment programs.** The extra time that these programs provide can offer the support that ELLs need to catch up to their peers both academically and linguistically. Participation in these programs can help to provide Latinas (and

Latinos in general) with the support and tools they need to be college- or work-ready, and can help them to develop into healthy, self-sufficient adults.

The U.S. Department of Education should:

- ▶ **Aggressively enforce civil rights laws** to send a strong message to schools about their continuing civil rights obligations and ensure their adherence to them. Because civil rights laws have not been enforced rigorously in recent years, many schools are not in compliance. The Department should conduct compliance reviews in a number of different areas, investigate complaints, and issue new guidance where needed.¹¹⁵
 - ~ Specifically, the Department of Education should increase enforcement of the Title IX’s requirements relating to pregnant and parenting students,¹¹⁶ so they are not discriminated against, stigmatized, or treated as second-class citizens at their schools.¹¹⁷
 - ~ The Department of Education should increase enforcement of Title VI to ensure that the rights of ELLs are not violated by local school districts and that necessary services are provided to ELLs.
 - ~ The Department also should enforce other Title IX and Title VI requirements that schools give all students equal access to all educational opportunities, including athletics programs, extracurricular activities, and career and technical education (CTE) programs.¹¹⁸ Schools must ensure that all boys and all girls, including pregnant and parenting students and ELLs, can attend school in an environment free of discrimination, stereotypes, and harassment. And schools must tell students how and to whom to report incidents of discrimination and harassment.

Congress should:

- ▶ **Fund adequate civil rights enforcement and the development of multicultural, inclusive curricula.**
- ▶ **Overtake harmful Supreme Court decisions that undermine students’ ability to hold schools fully accountable for sexual and other harassment.**

5. Help Latino parents get more involved in the education of their children.

Schools should:

- ▶ **Develop and implement parent involvement initiatives for the parents of Latino students.** Because many Latino parents are not comfortable speaking English and are not familiar with the school system in this country, schools should ensure that Latino parents are encouraged to attend meetings and are generally made to feel welcome. At a minimum, schools should have an individual who can translate English to Spanish and Spanish to English attend every school meeting, including PTA meetings, and make such a person available for any parent-teacher conferences or counselor meetings with Latino parents.

- ▶ **Conduct outreach to Latino parents**, who may not be aware of meetings or the significance of being in contact with their child’s school, or who may be unable to attend because of work or child care issues. Schools can send out flyers in Spanish and English on a regular basis, updating parents about school activities. For students most at risk of dropping out, phone calls and home visits may be necessary.
- ▶ **Arrange for guidance counselors or college representatives to meet with parents** at various times during the day and evening, and encourage Latino parents to participate. Many Latino parents do not have access to information about the requirements for college or other post-secondary schools, financial aid eligibility, or scholarship opportunities. Schools can hold college information sessions for parents and students with a Spanish–English interpreter, and can send letters home (in both Spanish and English) regarding high school graduation requirements, college readiness, and the steps necessary to prepare for post-secondary options.

States and local communities should:

- ▶ **Work to expand educational opportunities for Latino parents**, including adult ESL and GED programs. Doing so will improve parents’ ability to communicate and access necessary social services, and will foster their sense of connection to the local community. Unfortunately, many of these programs are facing cuts in light of state budget deficits.¹¹⁹ States and communities must recognize that these programs are important for long-term community health.

Federal, state, and local governments should:

- ▶ **Fund parent involvement initiatives.**
- ▶ **Identify successful parent involvement programs**, and provide funding and technical assistance to expand and replicate them.

6. Improve efforts to prevent teen pregnancy, including the provision of comprehensive sex education to students.

As noted earlier, Latinas have the highest teen birth rates in the country, and pregnancy and parenting responsibilities are a major obstacle to completing high school. Therefore, pregnancy prevention doubles as a dropout prevention strategy. Schools that want to improve their graduation rates should do more to prevent teen pregnancy. Conversely, because girls who drop out are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers, efforts to lower dropout rates should help to lower pregnancy rates as well.

To improve the graduation rates of Latinas and their chances of achieving economic security,

Schools should:

- ▶ **Provide students with comprehensive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate sex education** that includes information about contraception, abstinence, and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, in a culturally appropriate manner. Abstinence-only education provides misleading and incomplete information to teens and has not been effective at combating teen pregnancy.

Congress should:

- ▶ **Instead of funding abstinence-only programs, dedicate funding to provide teens with comprehensive sex education**—including information about contraception, abstinence, and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS.
- ▶ **Provide grants for school- and community-based programs and public education campaigns** aimed at preventing the incidence of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among teens in racial or ethnic minority or immigrant communities.
- ▶ **Expand access to affordable contraception** by: increasing funding for programs that provide confidential, publicly-subsidized family planning and preventive health services to low-income women and men; making it easier for states to expand eligibility for federally supported family planning services; and ensuring that the benefits offered through health reform legislation include contraceptive care.



7. Support pregnant and parenting students.

Some students will become pregnant, and students who get pregnant, and those who have children, tend to drop out in large numbers. As a result, any attempt to improve high school graduation rates must address the barriers posed by pregnancy and parenting responsibilities.

Schools should:

- ▶ **Eliminate discriminatory barriers against pregnant and parenting students.**
- ▶ **Do even more to keep pregnant and parenting students in school.** Current school programs to support pregnant and parenting students (including teen fathers) take one of two approaches: they either offer the supports within the students' original high school environment, or allow the students to attend classes at another site and provide a number of services for them at that location. More research is necessary to evaluate the relative efficacy of these approaches.

There is, however, much anecdotal evidence about what works, wherever the services are provided. For example, schools can:

- ~ Provide access to quality, affordable child care, preferably on-site;
- ~ Provide free transportation for the student and her child to and from school/child care;
- ~ Ensure that pregnant and parenting students have a strong support system, including regular, encouraging guidance from school counselors or advisors, and even a peer support group;
- ~ Provide referrals or regular access to health care providers, social workers, and other service providers whom girls can trust;
- ~ Excuse absences following the delivery of a child for at least six weeks and for as long thereafter as the student's doctor recommends;
- ~ Provide homebound instruction services to help the student keep up with her schoolwork while she is out on leave;

- ~ To the extent possible, be flexible in scheduling a pregnant and parenting student's classes and assignments, and excuse absences of the custodial parent when their child is sick or has a doctor's appointment;
- ~ Offer a class for pregnant and parenting students (including teen fathers) covering parenting skills, healthy relationships, time management, budgeting, and other life skills and resources; and
- ~ Give pregnant and parenting students consistent encouragement, so they believe they can succeed.

The most successful approach likely will be one that is comprehensive, addressing the physical, social, emotional, financial, and academic needs of such students.

Federal, state, and local governments should:

- ▶ **Provide schools with the funding and technical assistance to establish programs to support pregnant and parenting students.**
- ▶ **Increase funding for housing**, as there is a shortage of housing for teen parents without a place to live, and paying rent is a problem for parenting students who spend most of the work day in school and care for their children after school.

The Department of Education should:

- ▶ **Enforce Title IX** and ensure that schools are not discriminating against pregnant and parenting students nor impeding their ability to continue going to school.
- ▶ **Require schools to change policies, practices, and school cultures that stigmatize** pregnant and parenting students and erect additional barriers to their success.
- ▶ **Educate the public** about the prohibitions of Title IX.
- ▶ **Provide technical assistance** to help schools develop programs for pregnant and parenting students.

8. Require Better Data Collection and Promote School Accountability.

Schools should:

- ▶ **Develop longitudinal tracking systems** to effectively compile data on the performance of individual students so that teachers and schools can be held accountable for the performance of all students, including those who are otherwise likely to fall through the cracks. For example, there are inadequate data on the number of pregnant and parenting students in schools, the number who graduate, and the type of education they are receiving. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated funding for these longitudinal tracking systems, and schools without such systems in place must develop them promptly.

Congress should:

- ▶ **Require schools to report graduation rate data disaggregated by gender**, to provide a more accurate picture of girls' educational status. This will not be overly burdensome, as schools should already have these data. However, while schools are currently required to report graduation rate data disaggregated by major racial and ethnic groups, by economically disadvantaged status, by disability, and by limited English proficiency, they are not required to report the data disaggregated by gender.
- ▶ **Require that graduation rate data be disaggregated by status as a pregnant or parenting student**, so interventions and resources can be targeted effectively.
- ▶ **Require that all reported data be maintained in a format that can be cross-tabulated.** Cross-tabulation will allow educators, policymakers, and the public to analyze disparities by smaller, more revealing subgroups. For example, by cross-tabulating graduation rate data, schools can track the graduation rates of Hispanic girls and compare it to the graduation rates of Hispanic boys or non-Hispanic girls.¹²⁰

Conclusion

Despite the many barriers and challenges they face, many Latina students possess a remarkable resiliency and a strong desire to succeed. When encouraged by caring adults in their lives, mentored as part of a school or after-school program, and given the support and encouragement they need to address the challenges they face, many of them not only can, but do, succeed. Implementation of the many recommendations contained in this report will help Latinas get closer to their goals. Policymakers and schools have large roles to play in helping Latinas translate their dreams into reality. The American values of equality and fairness and the obligation of public schools in this country to maximize the potential contribution of every individual to our society demand that we make this the rule, rather than the exception.

Appendix: Research Methodology

Dropout Rates and the Consequences of Dropping Out

The dropout rates presented in this report are based on Dr. Christopher Swanson's Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) methodology. The CPI uses school enrollment data to predict the probability that a student will graduate, using the average rate of success of groups of students in progressing through each grade level from ninth grade through graduation, at the district and state level. The CPI does not count GED holders as high school graduates.¹²¹ Dr. Swanson's CPI methodology allows for a more standardized comparison across districts, states, and years, and is considered the most accurate method for estimating graduation rates by several leading experts.¹²²

Survey Data

In September and October 2008, NWLC and MALDEF distributed over 1,000 surveys to schools and programs working with Latina students throughout the United States. The distribution of the surveys was not random, but rather was conducted through receptive contacts at schools and programs whom we knew worked with Latinas and were willing to distribute the survey to their Latina students. Three hundred and thirty-five surveys were returned. Programs and schools that returned the surveys included: a public high school and college access program in the Northeast; a public high school in the Northwest; two Hispanic mother-daughter college-access programs in the Southwest; an after-school program and community resource center in a Western mountain state; a Latina women's center in the Midwest; a mentoring program for Latina students on the West Coast; a program for at-risk public high school students in the Southwest; and a dropout-recovery GED program on the East Coast.

The survey instrument was designed through careful research and collaboration between NWLC and MALDEF. The survey included biographical questions, such as age, grade, place of birth and national origin, and school-based questions, such as number of the schools attended since kindergarten, what activities, if any, students participated in, and whether they felt safe school. The survey also included questions on whether the student had ever been sexually harassed or treated differently as a Latina and as a female. The survey then asked about school experiences, including the student's G.P.A., whether she had ever been held back, suspended or failed, and how many absences she typically had over the course of the semester. The survey also asked about goals and aspirations, such as "What is the highest level of education you would like to achieve?" and whether the student had ever thought about dropping out, and if so, why. The survey also contained a section specific to pregnant and parenting students, asking them questions about their school experiences as a pregnant or parenting teen.

Participation was voluntary. For those students who are still minors, parental consent to their participation in this research was obtained in writing.

Program staff surveys were also designed and distributed along with the student surveys, and were intended to gauge the challenges facing Latina students from the perspective of the adults who work with them. Several program staff surveys were sent with each package of student surveys, and 45 completed surveys were returned. The survey questions were primarily open-ended, and included questions such as "What do you think are the primary challenges facing Latinas in school?" and "What do you think schools could be doing better to serve Latina students?"

Figures derived from survey responses in this report were calculated using spreadsheets and/or by manually counting the numbers and types of responses to particular questions.

Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted

Survey respondents had the option of either remaining completely anonymous or placing their name and contact information on the survey to indicate that they would be willing to speak with us further. Of those who provided their names and contact information, we selected individuals with whom to follow up both at random and by targeting those who raised particular issues or risk factors (such as, in the case of students, that they had considered dropping out or had become pregnant while still in school). For this report, when discussing the survey answers and the follow-up conversations, we keep both the student and staff responses anonymous, protecting the confidentiality of their identities and the names of their schools/programs.

Telephonic interviews were conducted with 21 students and 15 program staff. Interviews with students covered a broad range of follow-up questions, including school experiences, family background, challenges to staying in school, and goals for the future. One student interview was conducted in Spanish; another partly in Spanish, partly in English; and the rest in English. Interviews typically lasted about 30 minutes in length. Interviews with program staff also covered a broad range of topics, including what program staff thought were the primary challenges facing the Latinas with whom they worked and what schools could be doing better to serve Latina students.

Four focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 28 students, each group ranging from 4 to 12 students in size. The students who participated in focus groups were different from those interviewed over the phone. Focus group interviews were conducted with Latinas from a dropout-recovery GED program and a college-access program, both on the East Coast. Two of the focus groups were conducted in Spanish. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. The group interviews covered a variety of follow-up questions regarding school experiences, family background, challenges to staying in school, and goals for the future. Focus group interviews ranged from 1–2 hours in length. No focus groups were conducted with program staff.

For all interviews and focus groups, extensive notes were taken, from which we drew the quotations used in this report.

All other data in this report were drawn from the work of other researchers. MALDEF and NWLC conducted an extensive review of the recent literature relating to Latinos' educational experiences, and in particular, the experiences of Latina girls. Many of those works inform particular areas of our report. Please refer to these original works, referenced throughout the report, for more detail on the research methodologies used by those authors.

Endnotes

- 1 Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons: The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students: National Summary*, 7 (Education Week, Jun. 2009), available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/06/11/index.html> (finding that nearly 1.3 million students in the U.S. from the class of 2009 will fail to graduate.).
- 2 See National Women’s Law Center, *When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail* 5 (2007), <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/Drop-outReport.pdf>.
- 3 Nationwide, only 59.2% of Hispanic girls graduate on time with a standard high school diploma, compared to 78.4% of White girls. Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *supra* note 1, at 2.
- 4 National Women’s Law Center calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement* (Table PINC-03: Educational Attainment—People 25 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings in 2007, Work Experience in 2007, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex), available at <http://www.census.gov/cps/>. Includes persons aged 25–64. All persons with zero income were counted as unemployed. Where findings are disaggregated by race, each racial category includes all members of that race “alone or in combination,” meaning that those responding could identify themselves as falling within each racial category either alone or in combination with other racial categories. The “Hispanic” category includes all persons who identified themselves as of Hispanic origin, regardless of race. According to this data, 85.4% of male Hispanic dropouts aged 25 to 64 are employed, compared to 53.2% of female Hispanic dropouts aged 25–64.
- 5 Henry Levin et al., *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America’s Children* 10 (Chart 3) (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2007), http://www.cbcse.org/media/download_gallery/Leeds_Report_Final_Jan2007.pdf.
- 6 See Richard Fry & Felisa Gonzales, Pew Hispanic Center, *One-in-Five and Growing Fast: A Profile of Hispanic Public School Students* (2008), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/92.pdf>.
- 7 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *A Look at Latinos: An Overview of Latina Teen Pregnancy & Birth Rates* (May 2008), http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/espanol/PDF/latino_overview.pdf.
- 8 The sample was not random; rather, we sent surveys to schools and student groups we knew of that have large Latino populations and that were willing to participate.
- 9 For further details, see Appendix: Research Methodology.
- 10 A recent survey conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy together with the National Council of La Raza also revealed that Latino teens have high educational aspirations: 57% of teens ages 12–18 stated that graduating from college was the goal they considered most important for their future, and 31% stated that having a promising career was the most important goal. Liz Sabatiuk & Ruthie Flores, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Toward a Common Future: Latino Teens and Adults Speak Out About Teen Pregnancy*, Figure 1 (May 2009), <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/commonfuture.pdf>.
- 11 Because around half of the girls we surveyed were participating in college-access programs, our numbers here may reflect a greater proportion of girls who aspire to achieve university degrees than the Latina population as a whole. But the majority of girls not participating in college-access programs also reported at least wanting to graduate from high school, and many reported wanting to pursue higher education.
- 12 Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *supra* note 1, at 2 (Nationwide, only 59.2% of Latina girls graduate on time with a standard high school diploma).
- 13 *Id.*
- 14 For details and data, see National Women’s Law Center, *When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2, at 7–11.
- 15 *Id.* at 9.
- 16 See *id.* at 10.
- 17 National Women’s Law Center calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, *supra* note 4.
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 Levin, et al., *supra* note 5, at 10 (Chart 3).
- 20 Jennifer Manlove, *The Influence of High School Dropout and School Disengagement on the Risk of School-Age Pregnancy*, 8 *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 187–220 (1998).
- 21 Andrew J. Fuligni, et al., *Ethnic Identity and Academic Adjustment of Adolescents From Mexican, Chinese, and European Backgrounds*, 41 *Developmental Psychology* 799, 802, 806 (2005).
- 22 Angela Ginorio & Michelle Huston, *Si Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School*, (American Association of University Women Educational Fund 2001), <http://www.aauw.org/research/upload/SiSePuede.pdf>, at 39 (“One probable source of this diminished self-confidence is the school environment itself. Although it requires further exploration, a recent qualitative study finds that Latinas wrote of being belittled intellectually more frequently than their African American and Anglo peers.”) (*citing* Pamela Haag,

- 23 In a CDC survey of high school students, 42% of Hispanic females reported feeling sad or depressed for two or more weeks in a row such that they stopped doing some usual activities, compared to 34.6% of White females and 30.4% of Hispanic males. A higher rate of Hispanic females (21.1%) reported seriously considering attempting suicide than White females (17.8%) and Hispanic males (10.7%). Centers for Diseases Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007* (June 6, 2008) at 9-10, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm>.
- 24 See, e.g., Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping out of Middle School: A Multilevel Analysis of Students and Schools*, 32 *American Educational Research Journal* 583, 584-87, 603 (1995); see also Russell W. Rumberger & Gloria Rodriguez, *Chicano Dropouts: An Update Of Research and Policy Issues*, in *CHICANO SCHOOL FAILURE AND SUCCESS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE* 114, 123-25, 131 (2nd ed., Richard R. Valencia, ed., 2002).
- 25 See *infra*, note 26. We recognize that these problems operate in conjunction with other factors and do not necessarily affect all Latinas. Of course, students from wealthy families may face some of the barriers discussed and struggle in school as a result, while many students from low-income families can—and do—succeed.
- 26 National Women’s Law Center calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, *supra* note 4. According to another measure, 73% of Hispanic fourth-graders in the United States in 2005 were eligible for free or reduced school lunch under the National School Lunch Program, compared to 24% of White students. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Participation in Education, Concentration of Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Poverty: Table 7.4a.*, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_7_4a.asp?referrer=report (last visited June 4, 2009). Despite their poverty, however, eligible Latino households are less likely to participate in the Food Stamp program (currently the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) than eligible non-Latino White households. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2005* (June 2007), <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/Trends1999-2005.pdf>. In addition, significantly fewer low-income Latino parents know about the Earned Income Tax Credit than Black and other non-Latino parents. Elaine Maag, *Disparities in Knowledge of the EITC*, Tax Policy Center (Mar. 14, 2005), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/1000752_Tax_Facts_3-14-05.pdf.
- 27 Patricia Gándara & Frances Contreras, *THE LATINO EDUCATION CRISIS: THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILED SOCIAL POLICY*, 63-66 (Harvard University Press 2009).
- 28 Sarah L. Dolan, National Council of La Raza, *Statistical Brief: Missing Out: Latino Students in America’s Schools* 4-5 (2009).
- 29 Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 90-92, 97-100.
- 30 *Id.*
- 31 *Id.* at 31.
- 32 For example, Latinos in California are less likely than White students to attend schools that offer Advanced Placement classes, and less likely to be enrolled in those courses when they are offered. Daniel Solorzano & Armida Ornelas, *A Critical Race Analysis of Latina/o and African American Advanced Placement Enrollment in Public High Schools*, 87 *The High School Journal* 15, 18-19 (2004) (finding that while Latina/o students made up 38% of California’s high school enrollment, they only made up 16% of the student population enrolled in the state’s top 50 high schools for Advanced Placement offerings. In the Los Angeles school district, for example, Latina/o students were 66% of the student population but comprised only 49% of the AP enrollment, while Whites comprised 12% of student enrollment and 22% of AP enrollment.).
- 33 Some reports suggest that the current economic crisis is hitting low-income Latino workers especially severely. See, e.g., National Council of La Raza, *Latino Employment Status*, March 2009, <http://www.nclr.org/section/marchemployment> (last visited June 4, 2009).
- 34 In 2002-2003, seven percent of Latino students were children of agricultural migrant workers. American Federation of Teachers, *Closing the Achievement Gap: Focus on Latino Students*, Policy Brief Number 17 (March 2004) (defining “migrants” as “students who are children whose families are agricultural workers migrating seasonally to harvest crops and who often work in the fields themselves.”). “Because they move frequently during the year, migrant students’ schooling and living arrangements are frequently disrupted, their academic studies lack continuity, and they receive little or no support at most of the schools they attend . . . often result[ing] in even higher academic failure and drop out rates for migrant students than for other Latino students.” *Id.* at 6.
- 35 *Id.*; see also Elizabeth Stearns & Elizabeth J. Glennie, *When and Why Dropouts Leave High School*, 38 *Youth and Society* 36, (2006).
- 36 See Rumberger & Rodriguez, *supra* note 24, at 130-31.
- 37 Research indicates that “one-third of Hispanic seniors [in high school], at a level at least ten percent higher than Whites, worry about money problems, family obligations, a lack of a good place to study at home, and parental disinterest in their education.” Ginorio & Huston, *supra* note 22, at 17 (citing A. Gustavo, *College-Bound Hispanics: Marking the Path*, *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, Feb. 13, 1998.).
- 38 Jennifer Laird, et al., National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2006* 7 (2008), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008053.pdf>.

- 39 Angelina KewalRamani, et al., National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities* 10 (2007), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007039.pdf>.
- 40 “Today’s Latino students, regardless of how long their ancestors have been in the U.S., are on average markedly less likely to graduate high school on time in comparison to white students.” Richard Fry, ERIC Digest, U.S. Department of Education, *High School Dropout Rates for Latino Youth*, (2003) <http://www.eric.ed.gov>.
- 41 Dolan, National Council of La Raza, *Statistical Brief: Missing Out: Latino Students in America’s Schools* *supra* note 28, at 1.
- 42 Even children who are U.S. citizens by birth may have parents who are unauthorized immigrants; there are approximately 3.1 million U.S.-born children living in the United States with undocumented parents. Jeffrey S. Passel, Pew Hispanic Center, *The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.* ii (2006) (estimates based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>.
- 43 KewalRamani, et al., *supra* note 39, at 42.
- 44 Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 33.
- 45 Gregory V. Flynn, *Increasing Parental Involvement In Our Schools: The Need to Overcome Obstacles, Promote Critical Behaviors, And Provide Teacher Training*, 4 *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 23, 23 (2007).
- 46 See Pauline Garcia-Reid, *Examining Social Capital as a Mechanism for Improving School Engagement Among Low Income Hispanic Girls*, 39 *Youth & Society* 164, 168-70 (2007).
- 47 See, e.g., Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 29; see also Garcia-Reid, *supra* note 46.
- 48 Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 68-69.
- 49 These numbers do not include surveys for which this question was left blank, but do include those where respondents wrote in “none,” “didn’t go to school,” etc. Many girls left this question blank, perhaps in part because the survey instrument did not ask about levels of education lower than “some high school.” National Center for Education Statistics data also show that parents of Latino children are far less likely than the parents of White children to have a high school degree: in 2005, 41.3% of Latino children ages 6-18 had a mother who had not completed high school, and 41.5% had a father who had not completed high school, compared to just 5.9% and 6.9% of White children respectively. KewalRamani, et al., *supra* note 39, at 20.
- 50 Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 19 (citing National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Statistical Analysis Report: America’s Kindergartners* (February 2000) at vii, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000070.pdf>).
- 51 One study found that academic encouragement and help with homework by Latino parents has been correlated with higher achievement and lower dropout rates for their children. Charles R. Martinez, Jr., et al., *Promoting Academic Success Among Latino Youths*, 26 *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 128, 143-44 (2004) (finding that both parent school involvement and parent academic encouragement predicted greater frequency of homework completion, higher G.P.A. and lower likelihood of dropping out for a sample of 564 Latino students in Oregon).
- 52 Martinez et al., *supra* note 51, at 137.
- 53 National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007: Indicator 17*, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2007/ind_17.asp (last visited June 4, 2009).
- 54 See, e.g., Rumberger, *Dropping out of Middle School*, *supra* note 24, at 607; see also American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment at School* 36-38 (2001), <http://www.aauw.org/research/hostile.cfm>.
- 55 See, e.g., National Women’s Law Center, *When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2, at 12-13; see also Rumberger & Rodriguez, *supra* note 24, at 128-30.
- 56 Charmaine Llagas & Thomas D. Snyder, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics*, (NCES 2003-008) (2003) at 38, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003008.pdf>.
- 57 *Id.*
- 58 Ginorio & Huston, *supra* note 22, at 3.
- 59 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 35, at 41-42.
- 60 *Id.*; see also National Women’s Law Center, *When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2, at 16;
- 61 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 35 (among 9th through 12th grade boys and girls of every racial or ethnic group, attendance was by far the most common reason for dropping out).
- 62 Ruth E. Zambrana & Irene M. Zoppi, *Latina Students: Translating Cultural Wealth into Social Capital to Improve Academic Success* 11 *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 33 (2002).
- 63 *Id.* at 42.
- 64 *Id.*
- 65 Angela Valenzuela, *Liberal Gender Role Attitudes and Academic Achievement Among Mexican-Origin Adolescents in Two Houston Inner-City Catholic Schools*, 15 *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 310, 311-19 (1993).

- 66 Centers for Disease Control, *Physical Dating Violence Among High School Students—United States, 2003*, 55 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 532, 533 (May 19, 2006), available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5519.pdf>.
- 67 See Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 29–30. This disadvantages Latino students, because, as Gándara & Contreras note, “an important aspect of formal education is the cultural capital (knowing how things work) and social capital (having access to important social networks) that are acquired while earning a diploma or a college degree.”
- 68 See Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq.) (prohibiting discrimination by federal funding recipients on the basis of race, color, and national origin), and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 et seq.) (prohibiting gender discrimination in education by federal funding recipients). For more information about Title VI, see Department of Education, *Education and Title VI*, <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html>. For more information about Title IX, see <http://www.nwlc.org/education>.
- 69 See, e.g., Craig A. Hughes, *What Teacher Education Programs Can Learn from Successful Mexican-Descent Students*, 27 *Bilingual Research Journal* 225 (2003); see also Aviles, Robert M. Davidson, et al. *Perceptions of Chicano/Latino Students Who Have Dropped Out of School*, 77 *Journal of Counseling and Development* 465, 469–71 (1999) (finding that Chicano/Latino students who had dropped out of school reported that lower expectations, differential treatment by teachers, and feelings of marginalization contributed to decisions to drop out); see also Martinez et al., *supra* note 51, at 142 (finding that “greater institutional barriers (measured by discriminatory experiences, school satisfaction, and unwelcoming experiences) significantly predicted both lower G.P.A. ($\beta = -.37$) and greater likelihood of dropping out of school ($\beta = .27$), controlling for students acculturation level.”). Perhaps contributing to the problem is that nationwide only about 11% of public school teachers are Latino, while Latinos constitute about 20% of the student body. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007*, Tables 40 and 65 (2007), available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables_2.asp#Ch2Sub3.
- 70 Fuligni, et al., *supra* note 21, at 805 (“Adolescents who reported that their ethnic background was a more central aspect of their self and an identity for which they felt positive regard also indicated stronger beliefs in the utility of education and school success, a higher level of intrinsic interest in school, a greater level of identification with their schools, and stronger belief of being respected and valued by their schools.”).
- 71 Ginorio & Huston have used the term “possible selves” to describe “the interaction between Latinas’ current social contexts and their perceived options for the present and future.” Ginorio & Huston, *supra* note 22, at x.
- 72 *Id.*
- 73 American Association of University Women, *Hostile Hallways*, *supra* note 54, at 36–38.
- 74 *Id.* at 37–38.
- 75 Gándara & Contreras, *supra* note 27, at 110–11.
- 76 Title IX requires schools to take steps to detect, prevent and protect students from sexual harassment. For more information, see <http://www.nwlc.org/sexualharassment>.
- 77 See Angela Ginorio et al., *Gender Equity for Latina/os*, in *HANDBOOK FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY THROUGH EDUCATION* 485, 488 (2nd ed., Sue Klein, ed., 2007). For more information on gender equity in career and technical education, see National Women’s Law Center, *Tools of the Trade: Using the Law to Address Sex Segregation in High School Career and Technical Education* (2005), <http://nwlc.org/cte>.
- 78 Ginorio et al., *supra* note 77, at 488 (citing Harriet D. Romo & Toni Falbo, *LATINO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION: DEFYING THE ODDS* (1996)).
- 79 *Id.*
- 80 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *A Look at Latinos: An Overview of Latina Teen Pregnancy & Birth Rates*, (May 2008) *supra* note 7.
- 81 *Id.*
- 82 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Press Release: Teen Pregnancy Rate Declines 5% Between 2002 and 2004*, (April 2008), <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/media/press-release.aspx?releaseID=15> (The Latina teen pregnancy rate in 2004 was 132.8 per 1,000 teens.).
- 83 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Policy Brief: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Teen Pregnancy* (July 2008), http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_PolicyBrief_RacialEthnicDisparities.pdf. (Noting for the first time in 15 years, the overall teen birth rate in the U.S. increased between 2005 and 2006.).
- 84 Comments we heard in interviews with both students and program staff suggested that perhaps the same low self-esteem that undermines Latina adolescents’ confidence in their ability to succeed academically and professionally also leads them to seek adulthood through different paths, including through sexual activity; on a subconscious level, perhaps some teenagers think that getting pregnant and having a child will fulfill their need for self-achievement.
- 85 Sabatiuk & Flores, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Toward a Common Future*, *supra* note 10, at 20–21.
- 86 *Id.*

- 87 *Id.* at 22 (noting that these differences may be related to the cultural values of machismo, “sometimes understood to define the qualities a Latino man should possess and cultivate in order to assume a patriarchal role in his family and social environment” and marianismo, “defining a woman’s role in her family and society,” and sometimes characterized by submissiveness). (The survey does not indicate the content of these messages or indicate how the messages of these conversations differ.).
- 88 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *Gates Foundation Dropouts Survey*, (Sep./Oct. 2005). Those who left school because they became a parent or to care for a family member, more than any other group of dropouts, were “most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.” John M. Bridgeland et al., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* 6 (Civic Enterprises 2006), <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>.
- 89 Studies have determined that school-aged teen moms who have two or more teen births are less likely to complete school and more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment than teens who have one or no births. Jennifer Manlove, et al., *Positive Outcomes among School-Age Mothers: Factors Associated with Postponing a Second Teenage Birth*, Child Trends (1997), available at <http://www.eric.ed.gov>; see also Diane Scott-Jones, *Educational Levels of Adolescent Childbearers at First and Second Births*, 99 American Journal of Education 461 (1991).
- 90 Saul D. Hoffman, Ph.D., The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Adolescent Childbearing* 19 (2006), http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/BTN_Full.pdf.
- 91 National Women’s Law Center, *When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2, at 14.
- 92 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 *et seq.* Under Title IX and its implementing regulations, among other things, a school may not exclude a student from extracurricular activities because she is pregnant, has given birth, has had an abortion, or is recovering from any of these conditions, and schools cannot force or steer pregnant and parenting students into alternative programs, which have to be equal in quality to the student’s regular program. 34 C.F.R. Part 106.40. The presumption must be that pregnant or parenting students can continue in school as normal, which is easier for students to do if their schools support and encourage them and treat them fairly rather than “write them off.”
- 93 Many schools mistakenly think that Title IX applies only to athletics and do not understand the full scope of the statute’s protections. For more information about Title IX, see <http://www.nwlc.org/education>.
- 94 These results may be skewed due to our sample size and the fact that most of the pregnant and parenting teens we surveyed are in teen parenting or other programs that provide them with significant support.
- 95 For example, in 2007 New York City closed its “p-schools” for pregnant and parenting students, which failed to offer rigorous classes, to keep students on track to graduate, or to prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities. A number of students reported being forced to attend these schools once they got pregnant. See Librado Romero, *New York’s Schools for Pregnant Girls Will Close*, New York Times, May 24, 2007.
- 96 National Women’s Law Center recently has been in negotiations with a school district in the South that has such a policy.
- 97 See, e.g., *Wort v. Vierling*, Case No. 82-3169, slip op. (C.D.Ill. Sept. 4, 1984), *aff’d*, 778 F.2d 1233 (7th Cir. 1985); *Cazares v. Barber*, Case No. CIV-90-0128-TUC-ACM, slip op. (D.Ariz. May 31, 1990) (both cases brought by pregnant students prohibited from joining the National Honor Society because of their pregnancies).
- 98 National Women’s Law Center has received numerous inquiries about the legality of these practices, among others that may discriminate against pregnant and parenting students in violation of Title IX.
- 99 Aviles, et al., *supra* note 69, at 465-73.
- 100 According to a survey conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 34% of Latino teens thought that being a teen parent would prevent them from reaching their goals; 47% thought that being a teen parent would delay them in reaching their goals. However, 17% felt that being a teen parent would either not affect their ability to reach their goals or help them reach their goals, suggesting “at least in part that many Latino teens may be aware of some of the consequences of teen pregnancy but not fully grasp how much of an impact a pregnancy could have on their lives.” Sabatiuk & Flores, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Toward a Common Future*, *supra* note 10, at 12.
- 101 Ginorio & Huston, *supra* note 22, at 17.
- 102 Zambrana & Zoppi, *supra* note 62, at 42.
- 103 Susan R. Sy, *Family and Work Influences on the Transition to College Among Latina Adolescents*, 28 Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences 368, 370 (citing Patricia Gándara, *OVER THE IVY WALLS: THE EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY OF LOW-INCOME CHICANOS* (1995); Sylvia Hurtado, et al., *Latino Students’ Transition to College: Assessing Difficulties and Factors in Successful College Adjustment*, 37 Research in Higher Education, 135 (1996); Andrew J. Fuligni, et al., *Family Obligation and the Transition to Young Adulthood*, 38 Developmental Psychology 856 (2005); Vivian Tseng, *Family Interdependence and Academic Adjustment in College: Youth from Immigrant and U.S.-Born Families*, 75 Child Development 966 (2004).).
- 104 William Velez, *High School Attrition Among Hispanic and Non-Hispanic White Youths*, 62 Sociology of Education 119, 126 (1989).
- 105 Deana Davalos, et al., *The Effects of Extracurricular Activity, Ethnic Identification, and Perception of School on Student Dropout Rates*, 21 Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 61, 69-70 (1999) (finding that White students were 1.32 times more likely than Mexican American students to participate in athletics, and 1.34 times more likely than Mexican American students to participate in other

- extracurricular activities); Women's Sports Foundation, *Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America* at 151 (2008), <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Research-Reports/Go-Out-and-Play.aspx>.
- 106 Davalos et al., *supra* note 105, at 69 (finding that students participating in non-athletic activities were 2.3 times more likely to be enrolled in school than those not participating in any activities, and students enrolled in sports 1.42 times more likely to be in school).
- 107 *Id.* at 63.
- 108 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requires that federal funding recipients, including high schools, provide equal athletic opportunities to their male and female students. 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 *et seq.* Still, the Women's Sports Foundation found that regardless of race, more girls were moderately involved with sport, whereas more boys were highly involved athletes. See Women's Sports Foundation, *supra* note 105. For more information about Title IX and athletics, see National Women's Law Center fact sheets, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/athletics>.
- 109 Women's Sports Foundation, *supra* note 105.
- 110 For example, many indicated that staying after school was difficult because they relied on the school bus to bring them home because of their parents' work schedules. Others mentioned that they had to get a job to help pay bills. Still others mentioned that they could not be involved in after-school activities because they had to go home to help take care of siblings.
- 111 Only 17 of the 204 students (about 8%) who reported that they were involved in one or more extracurricular activities responded that they had thought about dropping out of school. In comparison, 43 of the 117 students (about 37%) who responded that they did not participate in any extracurricular activities had considered dropping out.
- 112 Transcript, President Obama's Remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, New York Times, March 10, 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/10/us/politics/10text-obama.html?pagewanted=3&r=2>.
- 113 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *An Update on Budget Cuts: At Least 36 States Have Imposed Cuts That Hurt Vulnerable Residents, But the Federal Economic Recovery Package Is Reducing the Harm* (Revised May 13, 2009) (At least 19 states have implemented cuts that will affect low-income children's or families' eligibility for health insurance, and at least 22 states are making cuts to K-12 and early education.) Massachusetts, for example, has recently enacted cuts to Head Start and universal pre-kindergarten programs. *Id.* at 8.
- 114 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Education*, <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/education.pdf>.
- 115 For more concrete suggestions for improving gender equity in education, see National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, *National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education Recommendations for the Obama Administration and the 111th Congress*, March 2009, <http://www.ncwge.org/PDF/ObamaRecommenFinal.pdf>.
- 116 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and its implementing regulations bars discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and parental status, requires schools to treat pregnancy and all related conditions like any other temporary disability, and creates some requirements specific to pregnant and parenting students. 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 *et seq.*; 34 C.F.R. Part 106.40.
- 117 For more details about the Title IX requirements specific to pregnant and parenting students, see National Women's Law Center, *How to Keep Pregnant and Parenting Students from Dropping Out: A Primer for Schools*, <http://www.nwlc.org/pregnantandparentingstudents>.
- 118 Girls and students of color are underrepresented in CTE classes for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields of study—which have far more promise for future job opportunities and a living wage than traditionally female fields. Schools can and should take steps to make sure that girls know of these opportunities and can feel comfortable and safe taking these classes and participating in these activities.
- 119 In California, for example, recent state budget cuts have trimmed funding for adult education and literacy programs by 15% and another 5% will be cut next year. Diana Lambert, *Funding For Adult Education Cut Despite Growing Demand*, The Sacramento Bee 1B (May 13, 2009).
- 120 National Women's Law Center, *When Girls Don't Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2, at 17.
- 121 For more detail regarding the CPI, see Appendix: Research Methodology, National Women's Law Center, *When Girls Don't Graduate, We All Fail*, *supra* note 2 at 25.
- 122 Gary Orfield et al., *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis* 9 (The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, The Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, and The Civil Society Institute 2004).



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