

**Evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise
Working Paper #8**

**LATINOS AND THE
KALAMAZOO PROMISE:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
FACTORS RELATED TO
UTILIZATION OF
KALAMAZOO'S UNIVERSAL
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

**Working
Paper**

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Executive Summary

In this working paper we sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do Latino students and families differ from other ethnic groups in Kalamazoo? (2) How do Latino parents and students perceive the Promise? (3) How are Latino families and students initially impacted by the Promise? and (4) What obstacles prevent Latino students from taking advantage of the Promise? Findings reported in this exploratory study are based on various sources of data that include surveys and focus groups with Latino students and parents as well as input from service providers who work closely with Latino families in schools and in the community. The study also included a secondary analysis of data from the Kalamazoo Promise survey of high school and middle school students in 2008. This design allows for an examination of Latino families' relationship to the Promise from the perspective of diverse stakeholders in the community.

This paper also contains a review of relevant literature that illustrates the importance of economic resources, social capital, and cultural influences in creating or limiting opportunities for students to go to college. The review of research literature in this paper also describes the situation for Latinos in school districts across the country and explains why the unique socio-cultural characteristics of many low-income Latinos may place their students at particular risk for missing out on post-secondary opportunities. This paper examines the extent to which the Kalamazoo Promise can have a positive impact on the college enrollment of Latino students in Kalamazoo Public Schools.

What the Literature Tells Us About Latinos in Education

The rapid growth of the Latino population in the U.S. has changed the demographic profile of the school-age population. Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in our community, our state, and in our nation. Latinos increased as a percentage of the school-age population in Michigan from 2.9% in 1990 to 4.4% in 2000 and to 5.3% in 2006. Meanwhile, the number of non-Latino children in Michigan decreased 5.4% since 2000.

Nationally, Latinos graduate at lower rates and lag behind other students in overall college preparedness. Related to this, Latinos are also underrepresented in higher education, both among students and faculty. The research literature discussed in this

paper highlights that there are a complex array of factors that explain why education attainment levels for Latinos lag behind other ethnic groups in the United States.

Although considerable cultural and socio-economic variation exists within what is sometimes referred to as “the Latino community,” Latinos as a group—and Latino immigrants in particular—experience the effects of economic, social, and cultural factors that can interfere with academic success. Specifically, Latino students' educational achievement is hindered by limited access to the particular forms of economic, social and cultural capital that help more privileged students get ahead in school. Understanding how such factors shape students' educational options and experiences is crucial to understanding why Latinos are underrepresented in higher education.

The academic achievement of Latino students is also impeded by the fact that the importance of family in Latino culture creates interdependency bonds between students and family members that run counter to the individualistic culture dominant in mainstream U.S. higher education. Often, Latino students are compelled to fulfill family or work duties at the expense of their studies. This may be especially true for young Latina women, for whom family roles are highly valued.

In order to understand the situation of Latinos in education, this paper also examined theoretical literature that explained differences in educational access and attainment levels among ethnic minorities. Theories, such as oppositional cultural theory, are explained and discussed. Factors such as whether or not minorities are immigrants helped explain differences in school experiences among diverse minority groups. If minorities are immigrants, other key factors that need to be considered are (i) whether or not they are voluntary or involuntary immigrants, and (ii) the amount of time they have lived in the country (i.e., first-generation, second-generation, etc.). While most Latinos who immigrate to the United States today do so voluntarily, the lack of perceived opportunities and subsequent distrust in education as a path to progress may describe the situation of many Latino residents. Unfortunately, for many Latino families, there is insufficient evidence—that is relevant to them—that education will improve their situation.

Findings from Interviews and Surveys of Latino Parents and Students

- ❑ Most parents had extremely low levels of education and they lacked confidence in their English reading ability.
- ❑ Both students and parents reported that few family members had attended college, and not all parents had completed high school.
- ❑ While few parents reported using a computer, virtually all students we interviewed said they used a computer.
- ❑ Parents stressed that they wanted their children to focus on school so they could go to college and pursue a career they would like. They also wanted help from schools to impress the importance of education on their children and inspire them to take school seriously.
- ❑ Students reported moderately high aspirations for their future education and career goals, but had difficulty in articulating what was required to achieve their stated goals. Two-thirds of the students expected to complete at least some higher education, and all of them expected to at least graduate from high school.
- ❑ Students perceived relatively low expectations from teachers and others as a result of their ethnic/socioeconomic status.
- ❑ Students say that the attitude of their parents toward college is not always positive or supportive since parents do not necessarily believe that their children will be permitted to enroll in college.
- ❑ A quarter of Latino parents we interviewed had never heard of the Kalamazoo Promise and most reported that they knew nothing or next to nothing about university admissions requirements.
- ❑ Nearly all of the students said they were at least moderately familiar with the Promise. This high level of familiarity with the Promise did not correspond with accurate or complete knowledge of the requirements to receive the Promise.
- ❑ Students said sending letters home is the best way to reach parents, while parents prefer meetings where they can ask questions and get clarification on the information they do not understand.
- ❑ Parents do not often access local news, except through newsletters sent from the school.
- ❑ Latino students do not often know of or participate in after-school programs or other community services or programs.
- ❑ On the whole, the Latino parents that participated in the study were not optimistic about the likely impact of the Promise on the Latino community.

Kalamazoo Promise high school/middle school survey.

- ❑ Eighty-two percent of all Latinos in the sample said they qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, compared with 78% of Blacks and about 31% of Whites.
- ❑ Relative to other ethnic groups, Latino students reported that they were less likely to obtain a college degree. Latino students also reported that it was less often the case that either of their parents had obtained a college degree.
- ❑ Forty-five percent of Latinos in the survey reported that they received some combination of A's and B's, while 40% of Blacks and 69% of Whites said they received similarly high grades.
- ❑ Latino students reported that they perceived teachers had lower expectations for them than for White students. Perceptions of teacher expectations were similar for Black and Latino students.
- ❑ Overall, Latino students in the survey indicated that they were familiar with the Kalamazoo Promise. However, their reported levels of familiarity with the Promise were lower than they were for Black or White students.
- ❑ Ninety-two percent of the Latino students indicated that they were eligible to receive at least 65% of the Promise, while 72% could get 80% of the funding or more.
- ❑ Prior to the Promise, Latinos students reported the lowest levels of confidence that they could afford to go to college (38% of Latinos versus 46% of Blacks and 54% of Whites).
- ❑ Fifty-five percent of Latinos, 58% of Blacks, and 48% of White students in the high school sample agreed or strongly agreed that the Promise increased their college options.
- ❑ Thirty percent of Latinos, compared with 23% of Blacks and only 13% of Whites, reported adjusting their goals in response to the Promise.
- ❑ Forty-eight percent of Latinos, compared with 44% of Blacks and 31% of Whites, agreed that

they worked harder in school because they knew the Promise would help pay for college.

- ❑ Only 59% of Latino students reported that their parents encouraged them to work harder in school because of the Promise, versus 67% of Blacks and 63% of Whites.
- ❑ Twenty-six percent of Latinos, 20% of Blacks and 12% of Whites in the high school sample were still uncertain about their ability to afford college, even with the Promise.

Concluding Thoughts

This exploratory study revealed a number of challenges that are common for many researchers working in Latino populations, including language and literacy barriers, parents' long and irregular work schedules, and issues of trust between Latino parents and external researchers. An important note for future reference is that a considerable amount of time is needed for building relationships with families and organizations that serve Latinos in the community.

Some of the topics suggested for future research included the following:

- ❑ How does low socioeconomic status affect aspirations and expectations for poor Latino students?
- ❑ Why do some Latino students perceive low expectations from teachers?
- ❑ What are the factors that contribute to the success of those Latino students that thrive in school and are successful in postsecondary education?
- ❑ What are the actual and perceived barriers that undocumented residents face in terms of accessing higher education?
- ❑ How do Latino parents' perception of the feasibility and potential benefit of receiving a college education influence their motivation to seek out information about the Promise and to encourage college readiness?

Research on these questions will shed light on the factors behind student aspirations, parent expectations, and difficulties in conveying information about the Promise to the Latino community.

Based on the findings from this study, we highlighted a number of policy options and changes that should be considered. These include the following:

- ❑ There is a need to consider and promote new means of communicating with Latino families, considering parents' language and education backgrounds and limited access to computers.
- ❑ Overcoming language and technology barriers should be a two-way street, combining education to improve parents' proficiency in English and computer usage as well as increased efforts by school and community organizations to reach and interact with Latino families.
- ❑ Greater effort needs to be made to increase participation of Latino students in existing services provided by the community.

In order to fulfill the promise of making college available to all Kalamazoo Public Schools students, increased efforts are needed to ensure that families receive accurate information about the Promise in ways that are accessible to Latino families. Latino parents also need to understand and believe in the importance of a college education for their children's future success. Finally, more supportive measures are needed to boost Latino students' aspirations.

The findings suggest that Latino students in our community suffer from relatively lower aspirations and perceived low expectations from teachers. Some possible means to boost student aspirations include providing Latino students with additional encouragement from teachers and introducing more examples of successful Latino role models. As reported by informants we interviewed, there is a need to raise awareness of Latino issues among school staff which would help them provide culturally sensitive support for Latino students and their families.

The findings from this study serve as a reminder that the well-being of Latinos, the fastest-growing subgroup in the schools, is connected to the future of the entire community. By improving access of Latino students to higher education, young people will be more empowered to be productive contributors to society, thus lifting up the schools and community.

With the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise came an unprecedented opportunity to open doors to Kalamazoo residents of every class and ethnicity. Understanding the unique obstacles faced by poor Latinos is an important step toward fulfilling our promise to help all students continue their education after high school.

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Latinos and the Kalamazoo Promise: An Exploratory Study of Factors Related to Utilization of Kalamazoo's Universal Scholarship Program

Introduction and Background

The Kalamazoo Promise, announced in November 2005 and funded through the generous support of anonymous donors, offers free college education at any public state school for all district students who graduate and gain acceptance to a postsecondary institution. The Promise has been the object of national attention, and research is under way to measure diverse outcomes of the scholarship program relative to specific populations.

Latinos¹ as a group potentially stand to gain the most from the Kalamazoo Promise. Even as the population of school-age Latinos increases at a higher rate than the general population, Latinos are more likely than other ethnic groups to drop out of high school and less likely to finish college (Landale & Oropesa, 2007, p. 382; Institute for Latino Studies, 2009; Planty et al., 2009). Moreover, the Promise has unique conditions that make it more accessible than other scholarship programs and sources of financial aid for the immigrant population. Specifically, one need not present documentation of legal status in order to receive the Promise, and it can be used up to 10 years after high school graduation, making it available to undocumented immigrants as well as students who must prioritize family responsibilities before pursuing college aspirations.

This exploratory study examines the extent to which Latino students in Kalamazoo are taking advantage of the Kalamazoo Promise. This study also considers obstacles that prevent the Promise from having a potentially very positive impact on higher education enrollment by Latinos. Input from KPS employees working with Latino students as well as representatives from the Hispanic American Council was also critical in defining and conceptualizing the study. In addition to the input from KPS and HAC, the study builds on the existing body of research on Latinos in education, which helped in determining the

research questions and sub-questions. Our research questions, in turn, guided the conceptualization of the data collection and analysis. The following research questions and sub-questions guided our research.

1. How do Latino students and families differ from other ethnic groups in Kalamazoo?
2. How do Latino parents and students perceive the Promise?
 - a. Do they perceive the Promise as a real opportunity?
 - b. Do they know enough about the Promise to take advantage of it?
3. How are Latino families and students impacted by the Promise?
 - a. What are parents' and teachers' expectations for their children/students?
 - b. What are students' aspirations?
4. What obstacles prevent Latino students from taking advantage of the Promise?
 - a. What other factors besides information factors influence their possibility of taking advantage of the Promise?
 - b. Are parents and students aware of what is needed to access and succeed in college?
 - c. Are Latino families satisfied with the support provided by Kalamazoo Public Schools in preparing their children for college?
 - d. Are Latino families aware of and utilizing community resources?
 - e. Do Latino families have access to computers and the web—and do they use them regularly?
 - f. What are the most effective news sources or channels of communication for reaching Latino families and students?

Latinos in the United States: A Brief Overview

Latinos are a diverse and rapidly-growing segment of the United States population. While

¹ We use the label Latino, instead of Hispanic in this study. "Hispanics" is a government-endorsed term often used in formal instances. "Latinos" is less formal than "Hispanics" and is more inclusive of the diverse countries and cultures in Latin America.

Latinos accounted for 4% of the nation's total population in 1960, they made up 12% in 2002. Currently, due to immigration and higher fertility rates, the growth rate of the Latino population in the United States is four times that of the total U.S. population (Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Today immigration is so prevalent that foreign-born Latinos in the U.S. (40%) outnumber native-born of foreign parentage (28%) and native-born Latinos of native parentage (32%) (Landale & Oropesa, 2007).

The rapid growth of the Latino population in the U.S has changed the demographic profile of the school-age population. According to the University of Notre Dame's Latino Index, the number of Latino school-age children had increased 93% between 1990 and 2006, and 18.8% between 2000 and 2006. Demographic data in Michigan shows the same trend: Latinos increased as a percentage of the school-age population in Michigan from 2.9% in 1990 to 4.4% in 2000 and to 5.3% in 2006. At the same time, the number of non-Latino children in Michigan has decreased 5.4% since 2000 and has increased only 1.8% since 1990 (Institute for Latino Studies, 2009).

Latinos in Education: Underachievement and Under-Representation.

High school and higher education. The research on Latinos in education describes a dire situation. According to the National Academies' National Research Council (NRC), 40% of Latinos in the United States attend "impoverished inner-city schools that graduate less than 60% of incoming freshman." Moreover, native and foreign-born Latinos are less

likely than all other ethnic groups to finish high school (NRC, cited in Pluviose, 2006, p.1).

According to the report *The Condition of Education 2009* (NCES 2009-081), dropout rates for Whites, Blacks, and Latinos declined between 1980 and 2007 (Table 1). Although the gaps between the rates of Blacks and Whites and Latinos and Whites have decreased, the data show that Latino students have had the highest dropout rates in the country at least since 1980.² The statistics are even grimmer at the local level. At 30%, the estimated dropout rate for Latinos in Kalamazoo Public Schools is close to 3% higher than the dropout rate for Latinos in the state of Michigan.³

Table 1. US 1980-2007 Dropout Rates of 16-Through 24-Year Olds, by Race/Ethnicity

	<i>Race/ethnicity</i>			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>
1980	14.1	11.4	19.1	35.2
1985	12.6	10.4	15.2	27.6
1990	12.1	9.0	13.2	32.4
1995	12.0	8.6	12.1	30
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27
2002	10.5	6.5	11.3	25.7
2003	9.9	6.3	10.9	23.5
2004	10.3	6.8	11.8	23.8
2005	9.4	6.0	10.4	22.4
2006	9.3	5.8	10.7	22.1
2007	8.7	5.3	8.4	21.4

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Condition of Education 2009* (NCES 2009-081)

². The *status dropout rate* represents the percentage of 16-through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or equivalency credential, such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate). In this indicator, status dropout rates are estimated using both the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS). The status dropout rate includes all 16-through-24-year-old dropouts, regardless of when they last attended school, as well as individuals without a high school credential who may never have attended school in the United States and who may never have earned a high school credential (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The condition of education 2009* (NCES 2009-081)).

³. Dropout rate is defined differently here than in Table 1 and in the previous footnote. As used in Table 2, the dropout rate refers to the percentage, calculated as Dropouts divided by the 2008 Cohort Total, of the number of students in the 2008 cohort who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (MER; missing expected records). Graduation rate is the percentage, calculated as On-Track Graduated divided by the 2008 Cohort, of the total number of students in the 2008 cohort who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less (Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEP) State of Michigan. 2008 Cohort 4-year Graduation and Dropout Rate Report). Note that the higher rates of mobility among Latinos may inflate their dropout rate and deflate their graduation rate.

Table 2. 2008 Cohort 4-Year Graduation and Dropout Rate Report by Subgroup

<i>State of Michigan</i>							
<i>Subgroup</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>On-Track Graduated</i>	<i>Dropout (Reported & MER)</i>	<i>Off-Track Continuing</i>	<i>Other Completed (GED, etc.)</i>	<i>Graduation Rate</i>	<i>Dropout Rate</i>
All Students	145,097	109,542	20,594	13,551	1,410	75.50%	14.19%
AI/AN	1,376	912	267	163	34	66.28%	19.40%
Asian	2,984	2,618	206	141	19	87.73%	6.90%
Black	30,902	17,394	8,088	5,185	235	56.29%	21.17%
NH/PI	175	126	31	14	<10	72.00%	17.71%
White	103,631	84,787	10,500	7,309	1,035	81.82%	10.13%
Hispanic	5,329	3,215	1,384	655	75	60.33%	25.97%
Multi-racial	700	490	118	84	<10	70.00%	16.86%

<i>Kalamazoo Public Schools</i>							
<i>Subgroup</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>On-Track Graduated</i>	<i>Dropout (Reported & MER)</i>	<i>Off-Track Continuing</i>	<i>Other Completed (GED, etc.)</i>	<i>Graduation Rate</i>	<i>Dropout Rate</i>
All Students	767	494	138	129	<10	64.41%	17.99%
AI/AN	11	<10	<10	<10	<10	63.64%	27.27%
Asian	10	<10	<10	<10	<10	90.00%	10.00%
Black	369	206	84	79	<10	55.83%	22.76%
White	325	250	35	34	<10	76.92%	10.77%
Hispanic	52	22	15	15	<10	42.31%	28.85%

In addition to graduating at lower rates, Latinos nationally also lag behind other students in terms of overall college preparedness: A 2003 study that estimated the percentage of students in the public high school class of 2001 who actually possessed the minimum qualifications for applying to four-year colleges concluded that only 16% of all Latino students nationwide left high school college-ready, compared with 20% of Black students and 37% of White students. Students deemed “college-ready” had graduated from high school, had taken certain courses in high school that colleges require for the acquisition of necessary skills, and had demonstrated basic literacy skills (Greene & Forster, 2003).

High dropout rates and inadequate college preparation during high school are just pieces of the complex socio-cultural and economic circumstances that contribute to the underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education, both at the undergraduate and the professional level. According to Hardy’s 2007 summary of Latinos in education, Latinos made up 17% of 18-year-olds in the United States but comprised only 7% of undergraduates (Hardy, 2007). Latinos represent an even smaller portion of university faculty with tenure—fewer than 3% in 2003,

according to the U.S. Department of Education Faculty Profile (A Numbers Game, 2006).

The Importance of Research on Latinos as a Culturally Diverse Group

The preceding numbers may explain the growing attention to Latinos’ cultural diversity, not only in education, but also in research in psychology, human development or consumer sciences. In her article, “The Centrality of Culture to the Scientific Study of Learning and Development” (2008), Carol Lee says that researchers studying culturally distinct communities need to understand what is unique to each community and how this uniqueness reflects the inside perspective of its members. “Focusing on ethnicity allows us to consider the impact of how people live, their routine practices, and the consequences of such routine practices for their development” (Lee, 2008).

Although Latinos as a group share trends such as language and some social and family practices, they are a very diverse population. About 20 different nationalities and different socioeconomical backgrounds contribute to the significant variations within

the Latino community. In addition, there are cultural differences between Latinos whose family members have lived in the United States for generations and those who are recent immigrants. Kris Gutiérrez (2004, as cited in Lee, 2008, p. 273) at the University of California points out that we now have “binocular vision,” with one lens focused on what makes communities culturally distinct and a second lens focused on the variations within communities. Lee argues that understanding these variations is important to understanding human adaptation to the U.S. social, political, economic, and biological ecologies. This understanding is central to the scientific study of human learning and development (Lee, 2008).

Barriers to Success

Although considerable cultural and socioeconomic variation exists within what is sometimes referred to as “the Latino community,” Latinos as a group, and Latino immigrants in particular, experience the effects of poverty and social and cultural factors that can interfere with academic success. While Latino students benefit from many assets as a result of their Latino heritage, the resources available to low-income minorities do not have the same potency as those available to well-off White students when it comes to preparing students for higher education in the United States. Specifically, Latino students’ educational achievement is hindered by limited access to the particular forms of economic, social and cultural capital that helps more privileged students get ahead in school. Understanding how such factors shape students’ educational options and experiences is crucial to understanding why Latinos are under-represented in higher education.

Economic factors. According to a 2002 study of people living below the poverty line, 21.4% of Hispanics in the U.S. were poor, compared with 7.8% of non-Hispanic Whites, 22.7% of Blacks, and 10% of Asian and Pacific Islanders. To determine poverty rates, the study relied on the same thresholds used by the Census Bureau (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002).

A wealth of research indicates that students from low-income families are at a disadvantage in school. Crosnoe and his colleagues (2002) found that students from low-income families benefit less from parental involvement in their education than other students. According to the authors, economically disadvantaged

parents do less to promote higher education enrollment because they are less optimistic about their children’s chances for success (Crosnoe et al., 2002). Furthermore, the obstacles imposed by financial strain make it difficult for low-income parents with the highest of expectations to be active participants in schooling. Consider, for example, the cost of hiring a private tutor or taking time off of work to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Moreover, the high cost of attending college limits the higher education options of economically disadvantaged students. Pluviose (2006) points out that since two-year colleges are less expensive than four-year colleges, they are a more economically feasible option for low-income students. In fact, a majority of Latino students in higher education are enrolled in community colleges (Alexander et al., 2007).

Social factors. In addition to the adverse effects of low socioeconomic standing, Latino students’ higher education options are also limited by their access to the kinds of social capital that facilitate the path to college. Kao (2004) discusses the three forms of social capital as defined by Coleman (1998) and the ways in which immigrant children miss out on opportunities to benefit from the forms of social capital that promote school success: *obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms.*

Obligations and expectations refers to the ways in which associates support one another through the exchange of favors such as childcare or carpooling. Kao (2004) claims that immigrants are more likely to be isolated from the surrounding community, limiting their access to this form of social capital. “Immigrant and minority groups are, by definition, more alienated from the majority who are native-born and White and so may have fewer possible individuals with whom to exchange obligations and expectations” (p. 172).

A second form of social capital to which immigrants may have limited access is *information channels*. According to Kao (2004) and Coleman (1990), information channels convey useful information about schools, effective teachers, how to apply to college and information about financial aid. This information is not easily obtained and, in the absence of personal experience, must be gleaned through social connections. Thus, parents who know other, knowledgeable parents can help their children be successful in school by accessing vital information

about how to get ahead (Kao, 2004; Coleman, 1990). Kao found that even highly educated immigrant and minority parents, if not fluent in mainstream U.S. language and cultural norms, may not be as effective in conveying college knowledge to their children as native-born, highly educated White parents (Kao, 2004).

According to Kao (2004) and Coleman (1998), *social norms*, the third form of social capital, provide rewards for positive behavior and sanctions for negative behavior. When coupled with obligations and expectations among members of a group, social norms become a powerful mechanism for influencing individual behavior (Kao, 2004; Coleman, 1990). Social norms shared by a group of friends determine what members expect from one another. In turn, individuals in the group behave in accordance with the group norms so as to remain in good standing among their friends. According to Kao, social characteristics such as race, ethnicity and immigrant status influence the types of schools and peer networks that children occupy, in turn affecting the peer groups children elect. Social norms within peer groups ultimately promote or discourage schooling (Kao, 2004). Latino immigrants, who often attend impoverished inner-city schools, may be less likely to find themselves in friend groups that support high academic achievement.

Cultural factors. The academic achievement of Latino students is also impeded by the fact that the importance of family in Latino culture creates interdependency bonds between students and family members that run counter to the individualistic culture dominant in mainstream U.S. higher education. Often, Latino students are compelled to fulfill family or work duties at the expense of their studies. This may be especially true for young Latina women, for whom family roles are highly valued. According to East (1998), Latino culture places a high value on marriage and family, and childbearing and childrearing are considered the ultimate fulfillment of a woman's life (East, 1998).

The preeminence of family in Latino culture is evident in Latino women's preference and tendency toward early motherhood. According to East (1998), "Mexican-American girls, unlike girls from other racial and ethnic groups—are being socialized for marriage and childbearing to the exclusion of work-related or school-related roles" (East, 1998, p. 159). In other words, the high value of family in Latino culture orients young women toward childbearing and

maternal roles and not toward education and career goals.

In addition to influencing the sequence and timing of life events, the importance of family in Latino culture complicates educational attainment in other ways. A feeling of responsibility to family may make it difficult for Latino students to make the adjustment to the self-centered, individualistic lifestyle typical of U.S. college students. According to Pluviose (2006), leaving home to attend college may be especially difficult for Latino students and parents, as college introduces ideas that challenge parents' beliefs and values. When it comes to female students, parents may have an especially hard time letting daughters leave the immediate supervision of family to go to a college that may be seen as a competing influence with family values (Alexander et al., 2007). As a result, Latino students may limit their college options to local two-year colleges to avoid moving away from family to attend a four-year university (Pluviose 2006).

Oppositional culture theory and voluntary immigrant minorities. In order to understand the situation of Latinos in education, it is useful to consider Latinos in comparison with other ethnic groups. Oppositional cultural theory, proposed by John Ogbu (1990), is one way in which researchers have sought to understand the achievement gap between different racial and ethnic groups.

Ogbu (1990) argues that differences in the school experiences of different ethnic minorities can be explained by the diverse circumstances under which they joined the U.S. population as minorities. Ogbu differentiates between *immigrant minorities*, who moved to another society because they believed such a move would provide better economic well-being, overall opportunities or political freedom; and *involuntary minorities*, who did not initially choose membership in society, but were brought in through slavery or conquest (Ogbu, 1990).

According to Ogbu (1990), whether a population was voluntarily or involuntarily incorporated into society determines the way its members view their relationship to the society and how they orient themselves toward schooling. For instance, voluntary minorities strive to adapt because education is perceived as a means for social or economic progress. Since the disadvantages faced by immigrant minorities can be rationalized as products of their immigrant status, immigrants can imagine overcoming them with hard work and more education: tenets of the White middle-class folk theory. Meanwhile, involuntary

minorities try to show with their actions that they come to school with distinctive cultural and language patterns. In the school environment they will often defend their attitudes and behaviors, even if the consequence is academic failure (Ogbu, 1990).

Ogbu's theory (1990) also says that involuntary minorities have developed survival strategies, some that facilitate academic success, others that obstruct it. These strategies include: clientship/Uncle Tomming, collective struggle, hustling, emulation of whites and camouflage. Generations of experiencing barriers in the opportunity structure and in employment have resulted in the belief that education, individual effort, and hard work are not sufficient for success.

While most Latinos who immigrate to the United States today do so voluntarily, the lack of opportunities perceived by involuntary minorities and the subsequent distrust in education as a path to progress may also describe the situation of Latinos of second or third generations: there is not enough perceivable evidence for them that education will improve their situation (Ogbu, 1990). For our investigation, the potential barriers to success mentioned above have helped the research team understand the context for the study, and our understanding of these barriers helped inform the development of our research questions and our instruments for data collection.

Methodology

This paper reports on findings from an exploratory study on the relationship between Latinos in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the Kalamazoo Promise. Specifically, the study explores the ways in which Latino students and parents are affected by the Kalamazoo Promise and the obstacles that prevent Latinos from taking advantage of the Promise. This section describes the data collection, sampling information, and analytical methods used in our study.

Focus Groups with Latino Students and Parents

Using the research questions as a guide, researchers conducted focus groups with Latino high school and middle school students and parents. Students were sampled from among the attendees of after-school activities hosted by the local Hispanic American Council (HAC). They were provided with food and refreshments and received a university t-shirt for participating in the interviews. Twenty-five students participated in the focus groups. The median duration of focus groups students was 35 minutes. Seventy-six percent of the students were in district high schools, and 24% attended middle schools. The student focus group sample was 72% male.

Information on parent perceptions was gathered in two focus groups with a total of 10 Latino parents. Parents in the sample had children in kindergarten through twelfth grades. Both focus groups were audio recorded and conducted in Spanish by a native Spanish speaker.

In the focus groups, students and parents were asked to rate their knowledge and perception of the Kalamazoo Promise. In addition, students were asked to describe their education and career aspirations, while parents reported on their expectations for their children's future accomplishments. Other topics from interviews included access to channels of communication between schools and families and perceived barriers to attending college.

Description of Surveys of Latino Students and Parents

Based on the research questions, findings from the student and parent focus groups and input from key informants in the Kalamazoo community, researchers designed distinct surveys for Latino parents and students. Both surveys contained multiple choice and short answer questions related to knowledge and perception of the Kalamazoo Promise and expectations for student educational attainment. Students and parents also rated parent fluency in English, parental education level and frequency of communication between families and schools. To minimize language and literacy barriers, the parent survey was distributed in Spanish and either filled out by the respondent or read to the respondent by a native Spanish speaker. The student survey was distributed in English.

The achieved sample is not representative of the entire Latino population in Kalamazoo. Instead, the sample was based on a cross-section of low-income

Latinos largely residing in South Kalamazoo neighborhood that are affiliated with or participate in activities at the Hispanic American Council.

Kalamazoo Promise Student Surveys

This working paper also benefits from a secondary analysis of data gathered in a comprehensive survey of high school and middle school students from May 2008. This survey considers students' perceptions of the Promise as well as its impact on students, schools and the community. Surveys contained questions regarding educational experiences as well as questions related to the anticipated short-term and intermediate outcomes of the Promise. The survey contained Likert-scale items, multiple choice items, and open-ended questions. In addition to the high school survey, a number of items were added to a GEAR UP survey, which was administered in two of the three district middle schools in 2008; a total of 867 middle school students participated in this survey. In total, 2,760 students participated in the middle school and high school surveys in 2008, a sample that is large and representative of students in the district. Of these, 282 respondents identified their race or ethnicity as Latino/Hispanic or wrote another answer such as "Mexican-American" or "Puerto Rican," which identified their Latin American heritage. This sample represents more than 60% of the estimated number of Latino middle school and high school students enrolled in KPS during the 2007-2008 school year.

Data Analysis

Surveys from high school and middle school students and interviews with students and parents

yielded both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. The data we collected provided insight into stakeholder knowledge and perception of the Kalamazoo Promise and higher education more generally.

Qualitative data. With the guiding evaluation questions based on the theoretical frame, researchers used focused codes, or codes based on preexisting constructs, to organize the interview data by theme. Specifically, codes were created to track preexisting constructs such as student goals, volitional or intentional strategies, knowledge about college requirements and admissions process and knowledge and impact of the Kalamazoo Promise. Sub-codes were created during the analysis to identify and track emergent themes. These codes were applied to all of the student focus groups. This qualitative analysis was iterative, as researchers triangulated between patterns and associations in interviews, survey responses, and relevant theoretical and empirical research.

Quantitative data. Initially, we calculated descriptive statistics for each item of interest. For high school survey respondents, we combined related items that measured the same outcome using factor analysis, a statistical technique that groups items together that measure a single construct. Student responses were then analyzed in relation to important student demographic factors such as gender and socioeconomic status. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) strategies were employed to explore differences across groups of students.

Findings

Student Aspirations and Expectations from Parents and Teachers

Focus groups with parents and students revealed that students have plans for their future after graduation, but do not necessarily have concrete knowledge about how to accomplish their goals. Even those students who say they want to attend college to become a lawyer or a doctor say they are taking only easy classes and are not aware of how many years of college are required to reach their goals. Other students have plans to join the military or to receive

training in cosmetology or as a mechanic. Moreover, students we interviewed report having average or below average grades. This was true even among those who say they are relatively confident they will go to college.

Students said some friends had dropped out of high school and that others were not going to college because they felt pressure to attend to family obligations. One female former Loy Norrix student who had dropped out of high school explained, "Some [Latino students] don't do extra school stuff because they have to go take care of their little brothers or

sisters.” In fact, a few of the students in the focus groups had dropped out of school, and two participants were young mothers.

The incongruence between the aspirations and volitional strategies of interviewed students may be partially explained by the relatively modest education levels of their parents. Both students and parents reported that few family members had attended college, and not all parents had completed high school. Parents may therefore be less well equipped to offer advice to students about how to prepare for college and future career goals.

Students in the focus groups perceived low expectations from teachers and others, as a result of their ethnic/socioeconomic status. Students expressed a desire for more support from their teachers and from guidance counselors, especially at the high school level. Students also speculated that some of their peers would not aspire to go to college because they had repeatedly heard that Latinos are underachievers. “There’s a lot of people like, ‘you’re not going to accomplish that’. That is how it was in middle school,” said one female high school student. “We need more teachers to give us credit, be like ‘oh I know you can do it, I know you can,’” her companion agreed.

Several students were indignant about the negative stereotypes attached to Latinos in the community, and some expressed a desire to get a college education as a way of empowering Latinos. A female high school student stated, “I would like to study being a lawyer, like somebody who knows your rights, because a lot of Latinos who come here to the United States don’t really know their rights... they (Latinos) go to a lawyer and he supposedly helps them but in the end is not really helping because they didn’t read them their rights or like really do a good job because they didn’t really know what to do.” Statements such as those above suggest that Latino students in the focus groups view themselves as members of an ethnic group distinct from others. They seem to have pride in their ethnic identity, while sharing a belief that being Latino in Kalamazoo can sometimes be a disadvantage.

Parents in the focus group said that they wanted their children to focus on school so they could go to college and pursue a career they would like. However, they said that their children were mainly interested in getting a job to earn money and buy things like cars and televisions. Parents wanted help from schools in

impressing the importance of education on their children and inspiring them to take school seriously.

Knowledge of the Kalamazoo Promise

Based on information shared during focus groups, students have considerable knowledge about the Promise. They know, for instance, that you must attend Kalamazoo Public Schools for at least four years to receive a percentage of the Promise and that it can only be used at public universities and community colleges in Michigan. Yet not all students are aware of the scale by which the Promise is allocated according to length of attendance in KPS.

Both parents and students in the focus groups had received misinformation about the Promise. For example, there is the inaccurate belief that legal documentation is required to receive the Promise. Students say that the attitude of some parents is “what’s the point in trying hard in school if you can’t go to college anyway because you are not a legal resident?” Similarly, some parents thought there was a minimum high school GPA requirement or an application fee to register for the Promise, when in reality there are no such requirements.

One reason why knowledge of the Promise among focus group participants is fairly limited may have to do with the general disconnectedness from communication channels by which information about the Promise is usually transmitted. Focus groups revealed that parents do not access local news, except through newsletters sent from the school. Furthermore, students and parents say that parents do not use computers or there is no computer in the home, making it even more difficult for parents to interact with schools and access information about the Promise.

Parents in the focus groups said that their main challenge in accessing information about the Promise or the public schools more generally, is the language barrier that separates Spanish-speaking parents from English-speaking school staff. They also said that the Promise almost never arises as a topic of conversation with other Latino parents in their neighborhood, family, or church. Nor do interviewees discuss the Promise with their children at home.

When suggesting improvements for communication between families and the school, interviewed students said that sending letters home is the best way to reach parents, while parents prefer

meetings where they can ask questions and get clarification on the information that they do not understand. Participants reported that one person, the school's Migrant, Bilingual, and World Languages coordinator, is considered the source of information for many Latino families and the link between the school and parents.

A member of the research team observed a difference in Latino parents' receptiveness to different strategies for delivering information about the Promise. During one event for graduates of the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) course, efforts were made by a White English-speaking individual to raise awareness of the Promise by making herself available to answer questions raised by Latino parents. Her efforts were met with politeness from parents, but no parents approached to ask questions.

By contrast, when in conversation with an interviewer who was a Spanish-speaking Latina, the same group of parents showed themselves as very interested in knowing more about the Promise. In fact, parents in the focus groups were keen to ask questions of the Latina interviewer despite the fact that the interviewer had just met them and did not even request or invite questions. This particular example, coupled with the other information we collected and examples we heard during the course of this exploratory study suggests that Latino parents are hesitant to approach non-Latino representatives from the community or district. When approached by a person with whom they could converse in their own language, however, parents are more comfortable and are more likely to seek and share information.

This suggests that—for Latino parents—the manner in which information is conveyed is of great importance. Moreover, parents may be more interested in the Promise than is apparent to observers outside of the Spanish-speaking community.

Impact of the Promise

In general, students in the focus groups were not very motivated by the Promise. There was the sense among many of the students that they were already so far behind in school that any efforts to obtain the Promise would be pointless. Still, several participants reported that they were a little more motivated to work hard in school because of the Promise. A few students said that their parents or other adult family members talked to them about the importance of taking advantage of the Promise; most students did not talk

about the Promise with their parents, however. Students were emphatic about the fact that they rarely, if ever, spoke of the Promise with their peers. There was an understanding among focus group participants that speaking enthusiastically about the Promise among one's peers might be embarrassing.

A few focus group participants stated that the Promise may actually be operating as a disincentive for parents to encourage students to excel in school. This is because, prior to the Promise, it was necessary for students to strive to earn scholarships. When asked how the possibility of receiving the Kalamazoo Promise affected his parents' encouragement of his academic effort, one student replied, "If the Promise wasn't here, they'd be like more trying to push us harder because we'd need a scholarship because some people couldn't pay for it (college) without it (the Promise), so they'd want you to get a scholarship and make you study harder." This rationale is only applicable when students have the necessary legal documentation to qualify for other forms of financial aid.

Based on focus group responses, Latino students may also benefit less from the community services in place to help students take advantage of the Promise. Interviewees reported that students do not know of or participate in after-school programs or other community organizations, limiting their opportunities to benefit from the documented community response of support for student academic achievement since the announcement of the Promise in 2005 (Evergreen & Miron, 2008; Miller-Adams, 2009).

Parents in the focus groups were not optimistic about the likely impact of the Promise on the Latino community. When asked if they thought Latinos would take full advantage of the scholarship, parents said no. They thought that parents' lack of English proficiency and the cultural emphasis on having a job after high school would prevent Latino students from using the Promise. "The important point is that we don't speak English. This affects all of our children. All of them, all of them," one parent explained. "It affects that we don't go to the school and that we don't inform ourselves." Another parent lamented that she could not motivate her children to care about school. "The young Latino people come with the mentality of work and earn money," she said.

Survey Results

Latino parent survey. Results from the Latino parent survey revealed that respondents had extremely

low levels of education. In fact, only a quarter of the parents who took the survey had attended school beyond elementary school, and only one parent had attended any college. Surveyed parents also reported low confidence in their English reading ability; more than half selected the very lowest fluency-level option to describe their level of literacy in English. In addition all but one surveyed parent indicated that they did not use a computer. Finally, a quarter of parents had never heard of the Kalamazoo Promise, and all of the parents who responded indicated that they knew nothing or next to nothing about university admissions requirements.

Given surveyed parents' self-reported minimal familiarity with higher education generally and the Kalamazoo Promise in particular, it is unlikely that they would be able to personally deliver useful advice about how their children should prepare for college. Moreover, with their low confidence in their English language skills and minimal usage of computer technology, Latino parents are less likely to access other sources of knowledge that could help their children access higher education.

Latino student survey. Results from the Latino student survey revealed that students in the sample felt more confident in their knowledge of the Kalamazoo Promise. Almost all of the students who responded said they were at least moderately familiar with the Promise. All of them calculated that their length of attendance at Kalamazoo Public Schools made them eligible to receive 80-100% of coverage from the Promise. However, students' high rating of familiarity of the Promise did not correspond with accurate or complete knowledge of the requirements to receive the Promise. Likewise, students reported moderately high aspirations for their future education and career goals, but had difficulty articulating what was required to achieve their stated goals. Two-thirds of surveyed students expected to complete at least some postsecondary education, and all of them expected to at least graduate from high school. Unlike parents who took the survey, virtually all student participants said they used a computer.

The fact that all of the students who participated in the Latino student survey were eligible to receive almost the full Promise scholarship underscores the great potential of the Kalamazoo Promise to benefit the Latino population in Kalamazoo. Nevertheless, students will not be able to take advantage of the Promise to achieve their goals if they do not

understand the requirements to obtain the Promise and gain access to college.

Kalamazoo Promise high school/middle school survey. Latino students who completed the middle school survey were divided fairly evenly into males and females, while 53% of Latinos in the high school sample were females. Eighty-two percent of all Latinos in the sample said they qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, compared with 78% of Blacks and about 31% of Whites. The rate of Latino students in the sample living in poverty may be higher than this percentage reflects, as some Latino families may not seek federal assistance if they do not have documentation of their legal status in the U.S.

Relative to other ethnic groups, Latinos in the study expected to complete lower levels of education. Sixty percent of Latinos in the middle school and high school samples combined expected to complete a four-year college education, compared with 70% of Blacks and 86% of Whites. Latino students were more likely than other ethnic groups to say they will go to vocational school. Nineteen percent of Latinos, compared with 16% of Blacks and 8% of Whites, said they expected to complete a vocational-technical education. Among Latinos who took the survey, high school students had slightly higher expectations than their middle school counterparts for their educational attainment.

Of all ethnic groups, Latino students in the survey were the least likely to report that they had a parent with a college degree. Twenty-three percent of Latinos, compared with 39% of Blacks and 55% of Whites, said their mother or female guardian had a degree. Meanwhile, 17% of Latinos surveyed said their father or male guardian had a degree, compared with 25% of Blacks and 47% of Whites. Across the three groups, between 15 and 25% of respondents said they did not know if their father or male guardian had a degree.

Based on survey respondents' self-reported grades on their report card, Latinos in the sample received slightly higher grades than Blacks and considerably lower grades than Whites. Forty-five percent of Latinos in the survey reported that they received some combination of A's and B's, while 40% of Blacks and 69% of Whites said they received similarly high grades. In general middle school students reported getting higher grades than their high school counterparts.

Overall, Latino students in the survey indicated that they were fairly familiar with the Kalamazoo

Promise. However, they were more likely than Blacks and Whites to say that they were not at all familiar with it, and less likely to say they were very familiar with the Promise. An overwhelming majority of surveyed Latino students said that their length of attendance in Kalamazoo Public Schools qualified them to receive at least a portion of the scholarship. Ninety-two percent said they were eligible to receive at least 65% of the Promise, while 72% could get 80% of the funding or more.

To assess the impact of the Promise, students were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements. Among surveyed high school students, the Promise appeared to have an especially great impact on Latino students' post-high school plans. Latinos were less likely than Whites or Blacks to say that they were not confident before the Promise that they could afford to go to college (38% of Latinos versus 46% of Blacks and 54% of Whites), but they were also more likely than White students (but not Black) to say that the Promise gives them more flexibility about where to attend college. Fifty-five percent of Latinos, 58% of Blacks, and 48% of White students in the high school sample agreed or strongly agreed that the Promise increased their college options. Strikingly, Latinos were most likely to report that they had changed their career goals because of the Promise. Thirty-percent of Latinos, compared with 23% of Blacks and only 13% of Whites, reported adjusting their goals in response to the Promise.

Latinos were also more likely than other surveyed students to indicate that they worked harder in school now because they know the Promise will help pay for college. Forty-eight percent of Latinos, compared with 44% of Blacks and 31% of Whites, agreed that they worked harder. While there was no major difference in students' perception that teachers or school staff had spoken to them about the Promise, Latino students were less likely to report that their parents/guardians

encouraged them to work harder in school because of the Promise. Only 59% of Latinos said their parents encouraged them to work harder, versus 67% of Blacks and 63% of Whites. Interestingly, Latino middle school students were more likely than their Black or White counterparts to say that their parents pushed them harder. Eighty-one percent of Latinos, 80% of Blacks and 74% of Whites agreed with the statement about parental encouragement. Despite the apparent impact of the Promise on Latino high school students, Latinos were more likely than others to say that they are still not sure if they can afford college because they are not eligible for 100% of tuition from the Promise. Twenty-six percent of Latinos, 20% of Blacks, and 12% of Whites in the high school sample were uncertain about their ability to afford college.

Latino students in the KPS high schools reported that they perceived that teachers had lower expectations for them than did White students. This difference was statistically significant. Perceptions of teacher expectations were similar in African American and Latino students (Jones, Miron, & Kelaher Young, 2008).

The survey administered to high school students across the district included a number of items related to student aspirations. *Student aspirations* involve inspiration through identifying short-term and long-term goals, and ambition in the form of well-defined strategies to maintain momentum towards these goals. A relationship was found between family income and aspirations (i.e., students from higher income families reported having significantly higher aspirations). We found no significant differences by race/ethnicity of students after we controlled for other background characteristics such as family income (Miron, Jones, & Kelaher Young, 2009a).

Latino and African American students perceived the general student body of their high school to be more motivated when compared with White students (Miron, Jones, & Kelaher Young, 2009b).

Discussion and Conclusion

Ideas and Suggestion for Future Research

In the course of collecting data for this exploratory study, researchers became aware of limitations in the methodology and specific challenges regarding research with Latinos. We learned that language and literacy barriers, parents' work

schedules, and issues of trust between Latino parents and researchers can complicate the data collection process. In future research with Latinos, more time should be allotted for building relationships with families and community organizations. The best way to reach Latino parents seems to be through the churches and organizations the parents trust. Moreover, instruments should be chosen considering

literacy issues specific to the Latino population. Written surveys, even when written in Spanish, may still be difficult for certain Latino parents to complete if they do not have the literacy skills to interpret the questions or provide responses.

Our findings raise questions worthy of further research. We know that poverty is associated with low student aspirations and expectations from parents and teachers. Considering that Latinos as a group are disproportionately impoverished, how does low socioeconomic status affect aspirations and expectations for poor Latino students? Specifically, further research is needed in order to understand why some Latino students perceive low expectations from teachers and to identify the factors that contribute to the success of Latino students that thrive.

The researchers also recommend further research to answer questions that were not covered in this exploratory study but deserve further attention. First, what difficulties does a person without a social security number encounter when applying to college and seeking employment after completing a degree? This question is significant in relation to Latinos and the Promise because, depending on the complexity of the procedure for qualifying for enrollment and employment without a social security number, the ability to access the Promise may not open many doors for undocumented students in the long run. In summary, further research is needed to understand the actual and perceived barriers to accessing higher education for undocumented immigrants.

Finally, further research is necessary to understand the ways in which Latino parents' perception of the feasibility and potential benefit of receiving a college education influences parents' motivation to seek out information about the Promise and to encourage college readiness. Research on these questions will shed light on the factors behind student aspirations, parent expectations and difficulties in conveying information about the Promise to the Latino community.

Concluding Thoughts

Given the exploratory nature of this study, more in-depth research is needed before specific recommendations about policy measures can be made. However, the researchers would like to suggest several implications of the findings along with policy options for consideration by those in position to influence the experiences of Latinos in Kalamazoo.

The first concern raised by the findings is the need to improve communication with Latino families. In regard to information about the Promise, updates about schooling and opportunities in the community at large, it is apparent that traditional channels of communication are not fully effective in reaching Latino families. There is a need to consider and promote new means of communicating with Latino families, considering parents' language and education backgrounds and limited access to computers.

In regard to the disconnect in communication, the researchers suggest that overcoming language and technology barriers should be a two-way street, combining education to improve parents' proficiency in English and computer usage in the long term with increased outreach by school and community organizations in parents' native language in the interim.

While tremendous efforts are currently in place to provide information in Spanish, there is still more to be done to ensure that Spanish-speaking parents have the knowledge necessary to facilitate their children's path toward higher education. For example, many Latino families do not take advantage of community services because there is not enough readily available information to inform them of their availability. By providing Spanish translations advertising opportunities to participate in community activities, such as after-school tutoring, the Kalamazoo community could increase Latino participation. Moreover, service providers could take advantage of effective channels of communication *already in use* in the Latino community to raise awareness of opportunities for involvement. Consider, for example, the Spanish-language newsletter circulated by St. Joseph, a Catholic church popular among Latinos in Kalamazoo.

Some Latino parents may not seek out information about the Promise, even when it is presented in the most accessible way possible. For some parents, sending their children to college is not even considered an option or a priority. Families with no history of higher education may not be familiar with the college application process, and they may not see the relevance of college for their children's future. The community can encourage Latino parents to seek out information about the Promise by helping them understand the way higher education works in the United States and informing them of the potential long-term benefits of a college degree.

The findings suggest that Latino students in our community suffer from relatively lower aspirations and perceived low expectations from teachers. Some possible means to boost student aspirations include providing Latino students with additional encouragement from teachers and introducing more examples of successful Latino role models. As reported by informants we interviewed, there is a need to raise awareness of Latino issues among school staff which would help them provide culturally sensitive support for Latino students and their families.

Finally, the findings from this study serve as a reminder that the well-being of Latinos, the fastest-

growing subgroup in the schools, is connected to the future of the entire community. By improving access of Latino students to higher education, young people will be more empowered to be productive contributors to society, thus lifting up the schools and community.

With the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise came an unprecedented opportunity to open doors to Kalamazoo residents of every class and ethnicity. Understanding the unique obstacles faced by poor Latinos is an important step toward fulfilling our promise to help all students continue their education after high school.

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