

Perceived Barriers to Post-Secondary Education
Options for Latino Students

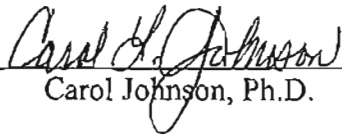
by

Sarah K. McCutcheon

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

School Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Carol Johnson, Ph.D.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

May, 2011

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: **McCutcheon, Sarah K.**

Title: *Perceived Barriers to Post-Secondary Education Options for Hispanic Students*

Graduate Degree/Major: **Master of Science in School Counseling**

Research Advisor: **Carol Johnson, Ph.D.**

Month/Year: **May, 2011**

Number of Pages: **30**

Style Manual Used: **American Psychological Association, 6th edition**

Abstract

Secondary schools within the United States seek to open doors for students as they transition to their post-secondary goals. For the rapidly growing Latino population, secondary schools throughout the country are faced with the challenge of addressing potential barriers to post-secondary education opportunities.

This paper will review current literature regarding the challenges of Latino students within educational systems in pursuing post-secondary education. In addition, the study examines the post-secondary barriers that exist for Latino students and investigates how these barriers may be overcome. Finally, the study provides ideas that school systems can include to better prepare Latino students in their pursuit of post-secondary opportunities through a multi-leveled system of support.

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Acknowledgments

There are so many people that I would like to thank for their help in writing this document. First, I have greatly appreciated the hard-working staff at UW- Stout and the opportunity to get to know them over the past three years. Their knowledge and expertise have helped prepare me for the school counseling profession, and I am extremely grateful for their ability to challenge, educate, and prepare graduate students in the school counseling program.

Most especially, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Carol Johnson and her dedication in helping me write my thesis. I experienced some difficult and unfortunate situations while writing my paper and I know that I could not have finished without her help and guidance. Dr. Johnson has the unique ability to acknowledge and interact with students in a way that demonstrates her caring and supportive qualities. She puts students' needs ahead of her own and has been the *perfect* example to me of what it takes to be a school counselor. I will forever remember her kindness as well as her professional assistance throughout the program.

Next, I would like to thank my parents for their support in helping me through graduate school. They have always stood by my side and supported all of my decisions. Furthermore, they have offered unlimited help watching my kids so that I can attend classes and work on my thesis. I would love to be able to provide the same support and encouragement to my children as they grow older, and make educational and life decisions.

Finally, none of this would be possible without my husband. He is the most considerate man and truly my source of strength during hard times. He has been there for me time and time again to help me work on my studies and educational responsibilities. He has also given me the support I needed to persevere in all of my professional and personal responsibilities. I am blessed to have such encouraging and supportive people invest in my life. Thank you!

Table of Contents

.....Page

Abstract.....2

Chapter I: Introduction.....6

 Statement of the Problem.....9

 Purpose Statement.....10

 Research Questions.....10

 Definition of Terms.....10

 Limitations11

Chapter II: Literature Review12

 Introduction.....12

 Identification of Barriers.....12

 Limited or Lower English Language Proficiency.....13

 Cultural Stereotypes and Biases within Schools and Communities.....14

 Social and Economic Barriers.....19

Chapter III: Discussion and Recommendations.....22

 Introduction.....22

 Summary22

 Discussion.....24

 Recommendations.....25

References.....28

Chapter I: Introduction

The purpose of secondary education is to prepare students to meet their post-secondary goals. This includes providing students with the necessary experiences, resources, and skills needed to be successful in either post-secondary education or employment opportunities. As students prepare for this transition, they might face visible and invisible barriers that may threaten the realization of these goals. School personnel and programs are challenged with the task of identifying these barriers while enabling students to overcome obstacles and maximize their opportunities.

As a subgroup within education, Latino students often encounter unique and specific barriers in reaching their post-secondary dreams. Some of these barriers are often easily identified by school personnel, while others may go unnoticed or unacknowledged. Namely, these barriers include limited or lower English language proficiency, cultural stereotypes or bias from schools and communities, and social or economic limitations (Lopez, 2009; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Mount-Cors, 2008; Cortina, 2006). For many school districts, this rapidly increasing minority population also poses staffing and programming challenges. As a result, many districts may find themselves ill-prepared in addressing these significant barriers. Regardless, school districts still carry the tremendous responsibility of preparing these students for life after high school.

As mentioned, one of the barriers that Latino students may face in schools is stereotypes. For purposes of this study, the term *Latino* will be used to describe persons or communities in the United States of Latin American origin (The Free Dictionary, 2010). According to Graciela L. Orozco, in the article, *Understanding the Culture of Low-Income Immigrant Latino Parents: Keys to Involvement*, (2008) teachers may have stereotypes regarding low-income Latino

families. Some teachers believe that Latino parents are indifferent to graduating from school, or place little value on their child's education. School leaders and professional educators believe that they are the experts in a child's education, and as a result often neglect to acknowledge the role that parents play in their children's development. These perceived barriers may lead to frustration, alienation, and isolation as Latino families move through the school system. Ultimately, a chasm may develop between schools and families, hindering the collaboration and partnership that is needed in working toward a better future for these children.

At the same time, however, many school systems are attempting to address the barriers of cultural bias and stereotypes. These schools are often utilizing their existing resources to help Latino students transition linguistically and culturally. Often new programs, staff, and resources are added to address the unique needs of a heterogeneous population relative to their district and community. Surveys also indicate that most Latino parents appreciate their teachers' support in their children's education. However, greater collaboration and communication between home and school were cited as essential components for Latino children's academic success (Lopez, 2009). As a result, more needs to be done to bridge the gap between educators' stereotypes and the repercussions of those biases felt within the Latino family.

Latinos may also endure a social and cultural barrier to post-secondary education. When a student's parents are born and raised in the United States, there is a certain *understanding* of how the educational system operates. Native families, particularly those with post-secondary educational experiences, are more likely to know and understand about high school diplomas, college or technical school options, financial aid, and possible career choices. Most students who follow through with post-secondary education receive the majority of their guidance and support from their family members: parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. However, parents born

outside of the United States who face additional challenges, such as limited literacy or education, will likely find it much more difficult to give educational advice to their children. Latino parents, for example, may not fully understand the federal student loan program or may mistrust the post-secondary government programs and funds available to families and students (Pagaza, 2006). School counselors have the ability to provide *some* information regarding schooling options, but, in the end, parents are the ones who are often most influential in students' decisions (Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). In addition, these potential barriers are complicated when Latino students come into the country later in their lives. In these situations, both parent and child will likely have little or no understanding of the opportunities, resources, and services available to them (Lopez, 2009).

Another major barrier for Latinos is overcoming poverty. Lack of sufficient funds makes it very difficult to plan for college or other post-secondary options when there is a tremendous need to meet the family's daily living expenses. The majority of Latinos that enter the United States are looking for work. They often find jobs working in restaurants, housekeeping, farms, factories, or in seasonal agricultural. These low-paying jobs offer them almost ten times the wages that they could earn in their home countries (Whytock, 2006). By living a modest lifestyle in the United States, Latinos are able to send significant amounts of money home to family members, while at the same time supporting their family's needs in the U.S. They often work hard, long hours to be able to provide for their families, offering them a life free from hunger and full of possibilities. However, because of their economic status, future possibilities are forgotten and present needs become the priority. One of the most staggering statistics indicates that 74% of Latino youths with a high school education or less dropped out in order to work to help support their family (Lopez, 2009).

One final obstacle is the language barrier that may exist between students and teachers, or parents and teachers. Foreign born Latinos make up 35% of all Latino youths in the United States. Although they believe that pursuing higher education is important for success in life, an inability to speak English will greatly inhibit them. Along with the barriers mentioned above, they may also be unable to communicate well verbally or in writing, let alone understand material provided in class (Cortina, 2006). This, in turn, may result in students obtaining lower grades, and may lead to negative attitudes and beliefs toward academic achievement. In addition, language demands often associated with state's high-stakes content assessments have been found to invalidate the outcomes of the tests, resulting in students receiving lower scores on assessments and yielding unreliable estimates of their academic skills (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Wolf & Leon, 2009). As a result, students who repeatedly face these frustrations may perceive that they can serve their family better by dropping out of school and entering the work force sooner than later (Lopez, 2009).

It is easy to see how the barriers that Latinos face in pursuing higher education are all intertwined. Imagine how the lives of such a population could be changed if these barriers were addressed. Would more Latino students believe that they have the ability and potential to attend college if they didn't feel stereotyped by teachers? Would they receive more support from home if their families knew of their post-secondary options? And, finally, what if they truly understood how furthering their education now would affect their finances in the future?

Statement of the Problem

There is much that needs to be done to overcome these barriers to pursuing post-secondary education. The purpose of this review of literature is to study the post-secondary barriers that exist for Latino students and to investigate how these barriers can be overcome. For

first or second generation immigrants, there are many challenges that Latinos may encounter as they acclimate to a new country and culture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to research Latino students in the United States and the barriers that hold them back from pursuing post-secondary education. Along with addressing each of these barriers, this study will discuss actions school systems can take to better equip Latino students in their pursuit of post-secondary opportunities through a multi-leveled system of support. Different studies and articles will be reviewed to conduct this literature review in the fall of 2010.

Research Questions

There are a few questions that will need to be addressed in this study. They are:

1. What are the major barriers that Latinos face in pursuing post-secondary options?
2. How do these barriers affect Latino students?
3. How can a multi-leveled system of support be implemented in schools to aid Latino students in pursuing post-secondary education?

Definition of Terms

In order to provide clarification, there are a few terms that need to be defined.

Educacion is an all-encompassing education that stresses the importance of growing and maturing as a Latino person (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

Familismo is the strong family ties that exist within Latino families (Woolley, 2009; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

Hispanic is a Spanish-speaking person, or a United States resident of Latin-American or Spanish descent.

Latina refers more exclusively to women of Latin American origin.

Latino may refer to men, or men and women of Latin American origin (The Free Dictionary, 2010).

Respeto is the value that Latinos place on demonstrating respect for themselves and others (Woolley, 2009; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

Assumptions and Limitations

There are several assumptions made while conducting this literature review. The first assumption is that there will be a substantial volume of articles and resources to choose from in order to complete this study that accurately reflect the perceived barriers to success for Latinos. It is also assumed that most Latino students are first, second, or third generation immigrants that are here in the United States legally, and who wish to pursue opportunities for advancement. Finally, it should not be assumed that *every* Latino will face all of the perceived barriers to post-secondary education mentioned in this literature review.

The first limitation acknowledges that there are many barriers that Latinos may encounter in pursuing post-secondary education. The researcher will focus on the three main barriers that present as themes in the literature. Secondly, it is impossible for research to keep up with the vast number of undocumented Latinos entering the American school systems. Lastly, there is limited time and resources available to the researcher as some literature may be produced after this literature review was submitted.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will highlight three major perceived barriers that Latinos face in pursuing post-secondary educational options: limited or lower English language proficiency, cultural stereotypes and biases within schools and communities, and social and economic barriers (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006; Lopez, 2009; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Mount-Cors, 2008; Cortina, 2006). This chapter will also include background information on how the previously mentioned barriers were identified.

Identification of Barriers

Many students face barriers to learning and reaching their post-secondary goals. At the same time, recent educational initiatives such as No Child Left Behind, Response to Intervention (RtI), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Multi-Levelled Systems of Support (MLSS), and state and national benchmark standards, emphasize the importance of helping all individuals reach full potential, both in academic achievement and in preparing for adult careers (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Wolf & Leon, 2009; Levy, 2008). School systems, then, are challenged to identify those unique barriers to students and create systems that work toward enabling learning, opening opportunities, and empowering students toward achieving life goals. For Latino students, this is a critical time for schools to identify and address these barriers. Without these intentional efforts, the likely outcome for this rapidly growing student and community population will have significant implications for the future (Gross, 2004; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005).

The United States Latino population is the fastest growing population of all minority groups (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce,

2006). It is estimated that by the year 2020, 20% of all school-age children will be of Latin American descent. Data from across the nation reflects a growing achievement gap between Latinos and their white peers (Cortina, 2006). This comes during an era of a significant emphasis on educational accountability and a focus on student outcomes. In short, districts across the nation are failing to engage Latino students in learning and equipping them with the academic skills needed to advance in our society (Rivera-Mosquera, Phillips, Castelino, Martin, & Mowry Dobran, 2007). This study will focus on three specific perceived barriers found in the literature that Latinos face in the educational system; limited or lower English language proficiency, cultural stereotypes and biases within schools and communities, and social and economic limitations.

Limited or Lower English Language Proficiency

Many teachers and administrators today are struggling with how to address the unique needs of the rapidly growing number of non-English speakers entering their school systems (Cortina, 2006). Latino students coming into the United States have encountered an educational system generally unprepared and ill-equipped to meet the unique challenges of limited English proficient students. The Latino students, in turn, may have a more negative perception toward their classroom environment compared to their non-English Language Learning peers (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009). As students move through the elementary grades and higher levels within the educational system, these negative perceptions toward the classroom and the educational system are likely to follow them throughout significant transitional stages (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

One transition that presents challenges to Latino students involves assimilation into the new language and culture (Cortez, 2008; Cortina, 2006; Mount-Cors, 2008; Gross, 2004). While

young immigrant children have been found to transition better to the English language and American culture, older immigrant youth tend to become more frustrated with their lack of English proficiency. This often results in social, cultural, and academic barriers, which ultimately negatively affect closing achievement gaps and threatens assimilation with American peers. Frustrations related to limited English proficiency are also evident through lower scores on standardized state-wide assessments and high school drop-out rates among Latinos, as research studies have cited this barrier as a significant factor in high school completion outcomes (Wolf & Leon, 2009; Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

Another transition that is a pivotal point for Latinos is the transition from middle school to high school. This transition has been shown to also significantly impact drop-out rates among limited English proficient Latinos. Unfortunately, little is done to help transition students from middle to high school. Generally, these two schools work as separate entities, leaving a wide gap in a system of support for students with academic, behavioral, or linguistic-cultural needs. High schools often operate with a new set of rules and requirements, and are often uncharted territory for many students. When limited English proficient students are communicated with only in English, they may enter high school confused and unsure of the expectations placed upon them (Lys, 2009).

While additional staff and resources are needed to address this barrier, the majority of schools are often unable to redirect resources or restructure existing staff to meet the needs of students with limited English proficiency. Schools today are often faced with decreasing budgets and federal or state aid, resulting in staff reductions and program cuts. As school boards are faced with financial constraints, adding additional teachers fluent in Spanish or those who teach English Language Learner move to the bottom of the list of priorities. At the same time,

increasing educational accountability standards from the federal and state levels requires districts to move all students toward the academic standards and benchmarks set for each grade level.

These transitional stages, then, must somehow be addressed to increase graduation rates among Latinos. Districts need to shift priorities in the areas of funding, staffing, and resources, or they risk students continuing to fall through the cracks (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

A school-wide system that strengthens the home-school partnership is essential for children's academic success (Horner & Sugai, 2009; Cortez, 2008). For Latino families, Spanish-speaking educators and support staff are necessary to bridge the gap between families and schools. Language barriers may contribute to miscommunication or minimal communication. When teachers attempt to contact Latino parents, they have found it to be difficult and discouraging. If the parents are unable to respond to communication due to an inability to speak English, teachers often perceive them as being disinterested in their child's education (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005). In reality, the majority of Latino parents want to be involved in their child's schooling experience. They have had high hopes for their children and are motivated by a desire for a better life for their children. Unfortunately, since few schools provide interpreters or have limited bilingual educators as part of their staff, or provide printed material in Spanish, schools may unintentionally impact Latino parental communication and involvement negatively (Orozco, 2008).

Finally, the challenge of overcoming the language barrier hinders the development of healthy student-adult relationships outside of the family. This results in a decrease of resources available to Latino students within schools, often taken for granted by non-English language learning peers. A youth's relationship with adults can be one of the most influential factors in promoting school success for the future. Lack of participation in activities may impact leadership

or scholarship opportunities when language barriers discourage involvement in extra-curricular activities. Teachers have found it difficult to communicate and reach out to Latino students with limited English. These students could then feel even more isolated in missing out on potential role models and their educational influence (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Woolley, 2009).

Cultural Stereotypes and Biases within Schools and Communities

Latinos also face a second barrier to pursuing post-secondary education. In addition to having to overcome limited or lower English language proficiency, they must also endure cultural stereotypes and biases from within the schools and communities. In fact, an inability to speak English and communicate well with school personnel could actually contribute to these stereotypes and biases. Many cultural stereotypes and biases also stem from a lack of understanding of the Latino culture in the United States. Research from the California Department of Education has found that 70 percent of teachers in the state do not share the students' cultural or linguistic background (Archibeque, Castellón, Kibler, & Vaughan, 2010). Across the nation, increasing awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of the Latino culture, needs to be a priority for schools as they work toward addressing this critical barrier (Orozco, 2008).

There is one stereotype that needs to be addressed first. As stated, many school personnel may believe that Latino parents are indifferent to their child's schooling, and that they place low value on education. Latino students may be singled out early in the educational process as not having the ability or aspiration to strive for a college education. As a result, a significant number of these children have resigned themselves to a life of mediocrity. They have internalized a sense of failure even before an attempt is made to be successful (Martinez, 2003; Lys, 2009).

Research has revealed that nothing could be further from the truth. Latino parents overwhelmingly supported the idea of their children obtaining higher education. Unfortunately, many parents were unable to offer their children assistance due to lack of understanding of the educational process (Stern, 2008). Therefore, due to the many barriers described in this review, their desire did not translate into actual college entrance (Rivera-Mosquera, Phillips, Castelino, Martin, & Mowry Dobran, 2007).

Educators also may believe that Latino parents are not interested in their child's education because of their lack of involvement at school. Even more so, they may have a bias against Latino fathers. Fathers of Latino students may be more removed from the educational system due to work constraints and gender role distinction. For mothers, other factors such as transportation, child care, or absence of an interpreter may result in decreased participation in conferences. As a result, neither parent may be able to attend, leaving some room for cultural misinterpretation by teachers and staff. While these factors are not unique solely to the Latino population, these challenges in combination with other factors often multiplies cultural bias and stereotypes. These challenges, however, need to be identified within school systems and community cultures, and addressed through open dialogue, communication, and intentionality in working toward understanding (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

There are three important family values among the Latino community that have shaped their families and culture dramatically. These values must be understood in order to properly address biases and stereotypes that one may have. The first, *familismo*, is the strong family ties within families. They rely on each other and consider their families to be most important in their lives (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Cortez, 2008). Understanding this Latino family value also addresses any stereotypes that teachers might feel toward parents who are unable to

participate in their child's education. Teachers must first acknowledge that culturally, the family is of utmost importance in the Latino community. Then, after believing the best about them, they are able to more accurately assess the situation while looking for other reasons of why parents are not involved in working with the schools (Woolley, 2009).

Another strong cultural value is *respeto*. Latinos value interpersonal relationships and show this by demonstrating respect for themselves and others (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). This value is very important for schools to understand. When school personnel are able to show respect to students' parents, without being influenced by stereotypes and biases, parental involvement in schools will increase. If the parents are feeling stereotyped or disrespected, however, school districts will likely see an increase in parental hesitation to participate and a decrease in school involvement (Woolley, 2009).

Lastly, *educacion*, is extremely important to the Latino community. This type of *educacion* not only refers to academic skills, but to life lessons as well. Latinos believe in an all-encompassing education that teaches their children about life. While academics are important in their culture, they are viewed just as importantly as growing and maturing as a person (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). In short, life is about more than just good grades, graduating from high school, or learning content. There is also an emphasis on the personal development and becoming a successful person of character. Failure in this area reflects failure on the parents' role in their children's education. Some American schools tend to be quite the opposite. While there is a small population of schools that teach character education; academics, graduation, and future job potential are the reasons for sending kids to school. Teachers and parents in the United States may find it beneficial to add additional life perspective to the education system (Woolley, 2009).

Staff development and training in cross-cultural instruction for teachers and administration is critical to countering misperceptions toward the Latino culture and low post-secondary instructional outcomes (Archibeque, Castellón, Kibler, & Vaughan, 2010). Currently, 50% of Latinos who graduate from high school, less than one-third go on to college, and fewer than 7% of those who go onto college obtain degrees (Rivera-Mosquera, Phillips, Castelino, Martin, & Mowry Dobran, 2007). Much needs to be done including teaching staff looking beyond their initial beliefs or previous stereotypes to see the Latino population through different cultural lenses and making greater connections with Latino students. By developing these connections and increasing positive perceptions toward education, educational systems may build a stronger foundation to better increase post-secondary outcomes (Lys, 2009).

Social and Economic Barriers

Each barrier that Latinos face in pursuing post-secondary education seems to build on the previous one. First, limited English proficiency significantly impacts their success in schools and future career options. Secondly, they must overcome biases and barriers that they encounter by teachers and staff. Thirdly, there are perceived barriers placed upon them by their own culture and economic status (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005).

Latino students have often felt caught between two worlds, unable to balance the two (Cortez, 2008). One way that they feel caught is due to the strong role that families play among Latinos. They often possess different family responsibilities than their non-Latino peers. They are twice as likely to have children or elderly dependents, as well as be single parents. In the Latino culture, families take care of elderly relatives, and often send much money back to their home country to support family members. They may also have been young parents themselves who must now provide for their own families. Latino students, in turn, feel these cultural and

economic burdens to help take care of family. They feel both pushed to work and to finish their education at the same time (Fry, 2004). Eventually, many Latino students end up choosing work in order to relieve financial burdens for their families. Lopez found that 74% of Latino youths, who have a high school education or less, dropped out to support their family (Lopez, 2009).

There is also a great distinction between genders in the Latino community. Males had a low self-perception of completing high school (Lys, 2009). They may not have seen the need for a high school diploma or higher education. Instead, many Latino males planned on finding a low-paying job and earning enough money to support their family.

Latinas have their own hurdles to overcome. Whereas, they believed they could obtain educational certificates, they perceived little need for formal education. They often internalized gender role ideologies, planning on settling down with their own family at very early ages. Latinas may have dropped out due to pregnancy, finding it unnecessary to complete high school (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

The economic struggles that many Latinos endure, combined with the social expectations are examples of the final major obstacle in Latinos' pursuit of post-secondary education. Unfortunately, most Latino students do not develop connections or mentoring opportunities with other adults beside their teacher who possess a college degree (Gross, 2004). Therefore, they often lack additional educational support in helping them research colleges and careers, and make informed decisions regarding two or four-year college programs. As a result, students are left ill-prepared and confused about options available to them, leading them to enter the work force without seeking further education or training (Zarate & Fabienke, 2007; Stern, 2008).

The costs associated with college also require financial resources and support, and often poses a significant barrier to low-income households. Although parents' aspirations for their

children attending college were high, the major financial burden of post-secondary education hinders future options of education. It is estimated that only one in twelve children from low-income families with non-college educated parents will have a bachelor's degree by the age of twenty-four (Martinez, 2003). Tuition aside, there are also many costs associated with post-secondary education that are incurred prior to admission. Many college and community colleges require entrance exams, application fees, and ACT or SAT scores. Latino students from economically disadvantaged families may find these additional costs a luxury item in comparison to daily needs (Orozco, 2008).

As school systems identify these barriers to post-secondary options and outcomes for Latino students, intentional efforts to provide a system of support must be established. If school districts continue to ignore these barriers and fail to act in response to the research, our nation may continue to witness a widening educational, socio-economic, and post-secondary outcome gap between Latino and white students. System-wide reform efforts are needed in order to build a multi-leveled system of support that redirects services and supports to this at-risk population (Lys, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Levy, 2008).

Chapter III: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The United States Latino population is increasing at a rapid rate. For a nation accustomed to numerous waves of immigration, the significant number of Latino immigrants is presenting numerous challenges to the current educational system (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006). Similar to other immigration populations throughout the history of the United States, most Latinos are seeking a better future for their families, or jobs that will provide financial security during tough times. Schools districts all over the country, however, are struggling with how to keep up with an ever-changing school demographic, and how to best service these students while balancing their budgets (Orozco, 2008). One major concern for educators is helping Latinos identify and overcome barriers of pursuing post-secondary education (Lys, 2009). This chapter will include a summary of key points, discussion, and further recommendations for future consideration.

Summary

There are three perceived barriers that may limit Latinos' post-secondary education options. These identified barriers include: limited or lower English language proficiency, cultural perceptions and biases within schools and communities, and social and economic barriers. Each barrier presents significant challenges for the Latino population in their pursuit of education after high school.

When a student has limited or lower English language proficiency, it greatly influences the educational experience (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006). Latino parents may have desired a relationship with staff that is impossible without an interpreter, and schools' financial constraints often limit interpreting and translating services. This inability to

communicate with teachers deteriorates the relational bridge that should ideally exist between the school and home, and the student often feels the brunt of its disruption (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

In addition, the Latino students with limited English proficiency were also found to have their own frustrations. Students struggled with comprehension of subject matter which resulted in lower grades and lower scores on standardized assessments (Wolf & Leon, 2009). Many were more likely to drop out of high school due to an internalization of poor grades and a feeling of inferiority within the school system (Orozco, 2008; Gross, 2004; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). These students also tended to obtain lower scores on college-entrance exams, decreasing the likelihood of acceptance into rigorous four-year programs (ACT, 2007). In summary, the barrier of limited English proficiency significantly impacts Latino students and their families in pursuing further education and training (Cortina, 2006; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006; Lys, 2009).

The second barrier was cultural stereotypes and biases within schools and communities toward the Latino community (Mount-Cors, 2008). Unfortunately, many stereotypes that occur within schools were partly derived from the language barrier. For example, when parents failed to show up for parent-teacher conferences, teachers were left with the impression that the parents had limited interest in or support of their child's education. On the contrary, it was found that the parents listed their children's education as a top priority; however, because of the language barrier, direct communication with teachers was negatively impacted. As a result, the lack of available communication between teachers and families often led to misunderstanding, assumptions, and judgmental beliefs and attitudes.

The third and final barrier related to social and economic limitations among Latino students. The majority of Latino students come from families with limited resources. They also have fewer interactions with college graduates and exposure to post-secondary options. Latino parents have had many hopes for their future generations, but were very limited in their understanding of how encouraging post-secondary education for their children could forever change generations to come. Without knowledge of post-secondary options, the Latino children generally followed in their parents' footsteps, taking minimum wage jobs, rarely aware that other options existed (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Gross, 2004).

Discussion

Through analysis of the three main barriers that Latinos may encounter, it is apparent that they are all very intertwined. Each barrier can stand alone, hindering the Latino students' pursuit of post-secondary education, but together, they can do great damage. The unfortunate part is that, most often, Latino students are faced with more than one barrier at a time. If it were only a matter of finding a solution to *one* of the barriers mentioned in this review, the task wouldn't seem quite as daunting. However, to try and resolve all of the barriers together will take great effort and planning by the school leaders.

At the same time, it should not be assumed that every Latino family is encountering these three barriers. This type of assumption leads to greater stereotyping and biased attitudes toward this population group. The Latino population is a heterogeneous cultural group that cannot be easily categorized as facing all three barriers. However, the barriers explored in this study highlight the common challenges identified through research. It is critical for educators to assess each Latino family individually to find out which barriers, if any, they are struggling with at the time.

Recommendations

There are a variety of ways that schools and communities can help Latino students and families in pursuit of higher education; however, the most difficult part may just be the implementation of great ideas. Educational reforms within school districts, communities, and states present leadership, infrastructure, and funding challenges. These challenges often threaten to squelch great ideas before they truly take hold in schools. At the same time, school districts can take small steps at the local level to begin reshaping the school culture of their own community and develop a multi-leveled system of support. Through the implementation of four recommendations from this study, school districts may be closer to removing these significant barriers to post-secondary learning for Latino youth.

The first small step is that basic communication between home and school needs to become a priority (Cortez, 2008; Lys, 2009; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006). Schools should offer interpreter services for both the teachers and parents so that they can communicate concerns, accomplishments, and information (Pagaza, 2006). Letters and other papers sent home to non-English speaking families need to be translated as well. Once basic communication is implemented, the relationship between the parents, students, and schools will hopefully create an environment where the student feels supported in his or her endeavors.

Secondly, biases and stereotypes need to be addressed through professional development and community collaboration (Orozco, 2008; Cortez, 2008). Before schools are able to offer Latinos a proper and fair education, teachers and staff need to address their own biases and stereotypes. School administrators must take the time to offer their staff information on the Latino culture. Topics such as where and *why* Latinos are uprooting their families to come to the United States should be covered. There also must be more research into *how* Latino children are

impacted by the move and how it influences their educational experience. Finally, schools need to address the issue of *what* can be done by staff to bridge the cultural gap (Cortez, 2008). Each school will have its own unique population of Latino students. Once the school staff comes together to learn about their culture, breaking down biases and confronting stereotypes, they may then be able to look toward positive changes that can be made in making Latino students feel accepted in their schools.

Thirdly, once students and families are given options through interpreters to communicate with staff, and are now feeling more warmly accepted in their school environment and community, it is further recommended that Latino students are connected with mentors (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). Mentors may play a small or large role in the lives of students, but they can make a difference. Most especially, Latinos need mentors who are able to be that supportive bridge between the two cultures. In order to help these students discover their full career potential, they will need role models (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007; Fouad & Winston, 2005). Mentoring may be something as basic as answering questions about college and other post-secondary options, helping them fill out paperwork, or simply being someone who they know who has attended college. A simple interaction with a positive role model may be one of the most influential strategies for reaching Latino students and encouraging them in their academic pursuits.

One final recommendation in aiding Latino students in reaching their post-secondary goals is to provide classes for families regarding economic options for paying for further schooling (Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). Many Latino families are worried about how much post-secondary education costs, but most of the time, they may not understand what other financial

options exist for their children. Bilingual classes could communicate information regarding financial aid, scholarships, National Guard, and Work Study Programs (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Arce, 2006).

In summary, the critical first step for all school districts seeking to make a positive impact on Latino students' post-secondary outcomes is to clearly identify the cultural, academic, social, and economical barriers within their school communities. Failure to actively identify these barriers will result in ineffective efforts to improve student achievement. Once these barriers are identified, school districts are encouraged to establish a system that increases family involvement, community outreach and support, and professional development. Through these types of effective strategies to reduce barriers, there is a greater likelihood of improving post-secondary outcomes for Latino students.

References

- ACT, Inc. (2007). State of college readiness for Latino students. *College and Workforce Training Readiness*. Retrieved on February 20, 2011, from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/CollegeReadinessLatino.pdf>.
- Archibeque, M., Castellón, M., Kibler, A., & Vaughan, D. A. (2010). Making a difference for English learners. *Leadership*, 39(5), 16-18.
- Bohon, S., Macpherson, H., & Atilas, J. (2005). Educational barriers for new Latinos in Georgia. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 4(1), 43-58.
- Cortez, M. (2008). Trying to fit in a different world: Acculturation of Latino families with young children in the United States. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 40(1), 97-99.
- Cortina, R. (2006). Bridging language barriers. *School Business Affairs*, 72(2), 21-23.
- Gross, L. S. (2004). Creating meaning from intersections of career and cultural identity. *New Directions for Student Services*, 63-77.
- Fouad, N. A., & Byars-Winston, A. M. (2005). Cultural context of career choice: Meta-analysis of race/ethnicity differences. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53, 223-233.
- Fry, R. (2004). Latino youth finishing college: The role of selective pathways. *Pew Hispanic Center Report*. Retrieved on February 20, 2011, from <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/56.pdf>.
- Halgunseth, L. C., Ispa, J. M., & Rudy, D. (2006). Parental control in Latino families: An integrated review of the literature. *Child Development*, 77(5), 1282-1297.

- LeClair, C., Doll, B., Osborn, A., & Jones, K. (2009). English language learners' and non-English language learners perceptions of the classroom environment. *Psychology in the Schools, 46*(6), 568-577.
- Levy, H. M. (2008, March/April). Meeting the needs of all students through differentiated instruction: Helping every child reach and exceed standards. *The Clearing House, 81*(4), 161-164.
- Lopez, M. (2009, October). Latinos and education: explaining the attainment gap. *Pew Hispanic Center Report*. Retrieved on February 20, 2011, from <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/115.pdf>.
- Lys, D. (2009). Supporting high school graduation aspirations among Latino middle school students. *Research in Middle Level Education, 33*(3), 1-12.
- Martinez, M. (2003). Missing in action: Reconstructing hope and possibility among Latino students placed at risk. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 2*(1), 13-21.
- Mount-Cors, M. F. (2008). Bridging the differences: *Cultural background of Mexican students entering U.S. schools*. Retrieved from: www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/brdglangbarriers/4486
- Orozco, G. (2008). Understanding the culture of low-income immigrant Latino parents: Key to involvement. *The School Community Journal, 18*(1), 21-37.
- Pagaza, N. (2006). Latino students: The real barriers to higher education. Retrieved from: www.inlandempirefamily.com/t-Education_Latino_Students1206.aspx

- Rivera-Mosquera, E., Phillips, J., Castelino, P., Martin, J., & Mowry Dobran, E. (2007, November). Design and implementation of a grassroots precollege program for Latino youth. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(6), 821-839.
- Smith-Adock, S., Daniels, M. H., Lee, S. M., Villalba, J. A., & Arce, N. (2006). Culturally responsive school counseling for Hispanic/Latino students and families: The need for bilingual school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 10*, 92-101.
- Stern, G. (2008, December). Why Latino students are failing to attend college. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, 19*, 20-21.
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2009). Responsiveness-to-intervention and school-wide positive behavior supports: Integration of multi-tiered system approaches. *Exceptionality, 17*, 223-237.
- The free dictionary. (2010). *Hipanic*. Farlex, Inc. Retrieved from:
www.thefreedictionary.com/Hispanic
- Whytock, J. (2006). The binational migrant education program. Retrieved from:
www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/brdglangbarriers/989
- Wolf, M. K., & Leon, S. (2009). An investigation of the language demands in content assessments for English language learners. *Educational Assessment, 14*, 139-159.
- Woolley, M. (2009, September). Supporting school completion among Latino youth: The role of adult relationships. *The Prevention Researcher, 16*(3), 9-12.
- Zarate, M. E., & Fabienke, D. (2007). Financial aid as a perceived barrier to college for Latino students. *American Academic, 3*, 129-140.