

BOYS IN PERIL:
EXAMINING LATINO BOYS' EDUCATIONAL
PATHWAYS AND MOTIVATION
TOWARDS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION



Fall 2012

Latino boys in American high schools: A
study of the NCES 2009 High School
Longitudinal Study

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Boys in Peril

LATINO BOYS IN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The quantitative portion of the Boys in Peril TG research grant provides a close examination of ninth grade Latino boys in American high schools. This aspect of the project extends beyond the qualitative research work and provides nationally normed data that highlights critical elements about Latino boys. The report provides survey results that compare Latino boys to their Black and White male peers in three key areas: (Is there a reason for the use of boys versus male?)

1. Latino male educational aspirations, attitudes and beliefs about attending college, planning for college, and peer interactions
2. Parent demographics, parental attitudes and beliefs, school engagement, and college planning
3. School safety climate characteristics

At the individual level, the results highlight that ninth grade Latino male students compared to their Black and White male peers have different educational aspirations, attitudes and beliefs about attending college, and have peer relationships that may inhibit their decisions to attend college.

Next, these Latino male students are more likely than their male peers to have parents that are less educated, less involved in their schools, and less likely to financially support their college plans.

Finally, Latino students are more likely to attend schools that have unsafe climate characteristics that are less conducive to educational achievement and future college enrollment and participation.

We conclude with recommendations focused on informing, engaging, inspiring, and empowering critical stakeholders to address the Latino male educational achievement silent crisis.

POLICY BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The pressing reality is that men of color, and Latino males in particular, lag significantly behind their female peers in terms of both college access and degree attainment. This growing educational dilemma weakens the nation's ability to utilize its potential human capital and ensure the success of its diverse families and communities. This brief seeks to examine the educational environment for young Latino males in American high schools. A first step in understanding this complex issue is to explore how Latino males navigate and develop their postsecondary academic plans during their early high school years. We believe this policy brief provides compelling empirical evidence about the current plight of Latino males in high schools.

We begin the policy brief with an extensive examination of the status of Latino males in American high schools. We examine the educational experiences of these young men in three key areas:

1. Latino males' educational aspirations, attitudes and beliefs, college planning, and peer interactions
2. Latino parent demographics, high school engagement, and college planning
3. School safety climate characteristics

Our policy brief extends the conversation beyond the previous discussions about Latino males in education and focuses specifically at the issues relevant to policymakers and practitioners. It is our intent to provide information and strategies for stakeholders at the federal, state, regional, and local levels to both embrace and implement a comprehensive agenda that spans the lives of Latino males from their preschool enrollment through college degree completion. To that end, the policy brief intends to:

INFORM stakeholders with a current "snapshot" of ninth grade Latino males in American high schools

ENGAGE stakeholders with a discussion of the context of family and high school environments

INSPIRE stakeholders to closely examine Latino males' educational aspirations

EMPOWER stakeholders to develop relevant action that affects Latino males

2009 HIGH SCHOOL LONGITUDINAL STUDY SURVEY



We developed this policy brief using a national dataset of American high schools. The Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) developed the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) in order to develop a nationally representative sample approximately 21,000 9th graders from 944 schools who will be followed throughout their secondary and postsecondary years. NCES developed a comprehensive group of surveys to focus "on understanding students' trajectories from the beginning of high school into postsecondary education, the workforce, and beyond" (Ingels, Dalton, Holder, Lauff, & Burns, 2011, p. 1). This policy brief relies on surveys from ninth grade students, their parents, school administrators, and school counselors. We will focus the policy brief on the first wave of data collection which was collected in the fall of 2009 and produced a nationally representative dataset of students attending American high schools. We specifically focus our findings on Latino, African-American, and White males. The sample for this report included a weighted sample for each group and approximately represented 1,855,343 Latino, Black, and White ninth grade male students (25.8, 14.3, and 59.8 percent, respectively)

LATINO MALE STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS, AND COLLEGE PLANNING AND PEER INTERACTIONS

The challenges associated with Latino high school dropouts highlights an ongoing challenge for educators. The 2011 NCES Digest of Educational Statistics found a gap in dropout rates between ethnic groups. Latino students were three times more likely than white students to drop out of high school, (15.1 and 5.1 percent, respectively) (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). These differences in high school completion support previous studies that highlight challenges and barriers that Latino students face in their educational pathways to postsecondary education (Nunez, 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). In particular, we focus our attention on several individual level factors that may shape how ninth grade students' formulate their decision to attend a postsecondary institution. We compare Latino male students to their peers: Black and White ninth grade male students with regards to educational aspirations, beliefs about postsecondary education, and their plans to after high school, and peer interactions.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

The results from the 2009 HSLs survey indicate that Latino boys were less likely than Black and White male peers to report that they are *very sure about graduating* with a high school degree (see figure 1).

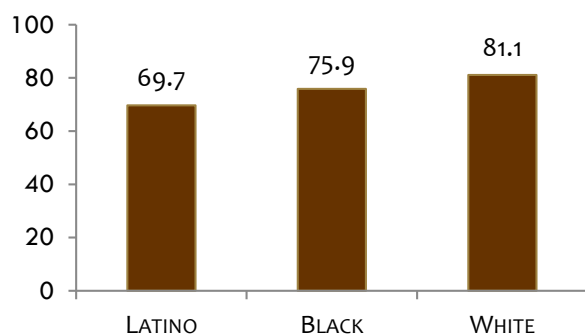


Figure 1 Percentage of students that aspire to earn a high school degree

These survey results mirror results from the Pew Hispanic Center's 2009 National Survey of Latinos. They found that Latino students' postsecondary aspirations did not match the high value they placed on attending college (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). That is, students highly valued the thought of going to college, but they had low aspirations of completing high school and attending higher education. Given that Latino males in the 2009 HSLs study have similar low educational aspirations, compared to their male peers, this suggests that Latino males are at the greatest risk of dropping out of high school and abandoning the option of attending college. I would consider rewording this sentence.

FACT #1 PLANS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

Don't know

How far beyond high school will you achieve?

23.8%

LATINO MALES

17.5%

BLACK MALES

14.1%

WHITE MALES

Moreover, when male students were asked how far they think they will get in their educational journey, approximately 21.8 percent of Latino males compared to Black males (17 percent) and White males (14.2 percent) indicated they will earn a high school diploma or a GED. Also, the fast fact graphic (see fast fact #1, above), indicates that Latino males are more likely to **not know** how far beyond high school they plan to achieve. Coupled with these aspirations, Latino males also had different beliefs about participating in higher education.

BELIEFS ABOUT ATTENDING COLLEGE

Latino male students were less likely than their peers to be *very sure about* going to college to pursue a BA/BS degree (see figure 2). More importantly, many of the high school male students reported different levels of beliefs about their ability to complete a bachelor's degree.

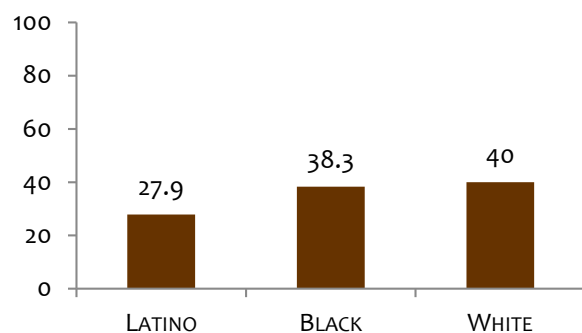


Figure 2 Percentage of students who are very sure that he will go to college to pursue a BA/BS

A comparison shows that Latino males were less likely than their peers to report they *probably or definitely* are able to complete a bachelor's degree (12.9%), Black (6.9%), and White (10.9%) (see figure 3). Another survey question asked students to indicate if they would be disappointed if he did not have a college BA/BS degree by age 30. Approximately, 76 percent of Latino males were not different when compared to White males (78.5 percent) but different from Black male students (71.5 percent).

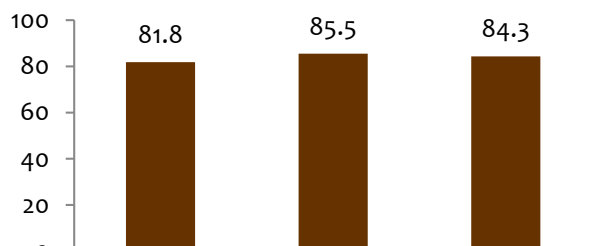


Figure 3 Percentage of students who believe they can complete a BA/BS college Degree

STUDENT PLANS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

The college choice process requires students to understand how to plan accordingly for the next steps in their lives. Upon closer review of the survey results we found that males had different plans after high school. For example, Latino males (45.8 percent) compared to Black males (42.9 percent) and White male ninth grade students (37.7 percent) were more likely to plan to get a job in the first year of after high school.

These results are similar to the Pew Hispanic Center's 2009 National Survey of Latinos which indicated that the greatest challenge to pursue their education beyond high school is their financial commitment to support their family (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

Additionally, some of these students indicated that they planned on starting a family in their first year after high school. Latino males (8.5 percent) had the highest percentage compared to Black males (7.2 percent) and White males (6.9 percent) to respond that they will start a family soon after high school. Similar to other males, on average, about 10% of the ninth grade boys plan to join the armed forces after high school (see fast fact #2)

FACT #2 PLANS FOR LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

YES

Plans to join the armed forces?

10.8%

LATINO MALES

9.1%

BLACK MALES

13.9%

WHITE MALES

Even though 11 percent of Latino males indicated that they would join the armed forces after high school, some other students had other post high school plans. Specifically, Latino students (20.9 percent) compared to Black students (17.2 percent) and White students (18.4 percent) indicated that they *strongly agree or agree* that working after high

school is more important than attending college (see figure 4).

PEER INTERACTIONS

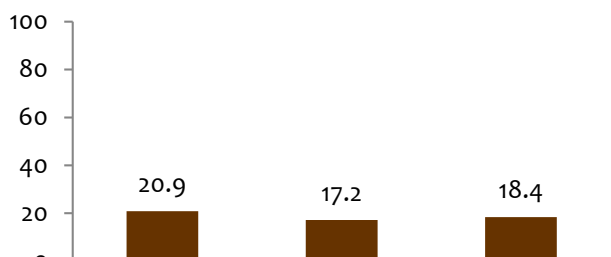
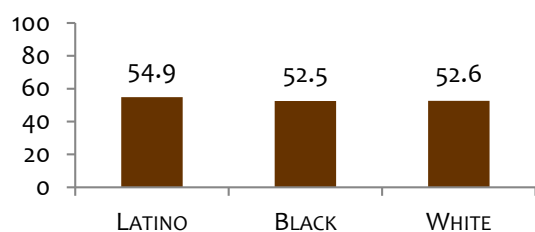


Figure 5 Percentage of students who strongly agree or agree that work after high school is more important than college

The research is replete with evidence that suggests peers play a major role in college planning (Perez & McDonough, 2008), enrollment (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), and persistence (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Many of the decisions that high school students make are often based on peer interactions. We found that Latino boys compared to their two



primary peer groups are more likely not to discuss issues related to college planning, college attendance, and career planning. For example, Latino male students (54.9 percent) compared to Black (52.5 percent) and White (52.6 percent) students reported the highest percentage of not talking to their close friends about going to college (see figure 5).

Next, Latino students compared to the other male groups had different educational plans. For instance, Latino males (78.1 percent), compared to Black males (80.1 percent), and White males (83.1) had the lowest percentage to report that their closest friend plans to go to college (see figure 6).

Figure 6 Percentage of students who have not talked with friends about going to college

Beyond college planning, these ninth grade boys also reported their discussions about post high school careers. Once again, Latino males (52.4 percent) compared to Black males (49.7 percent) and White males (48.1 percent) had the highest

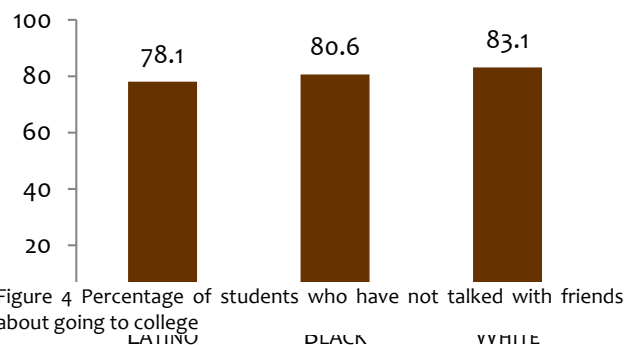


Figure 4 Percentage of students who have not talked with friends about going to college

percentage to report that they did **not talk** with their friends about adult jobs and careers (see figure 7).

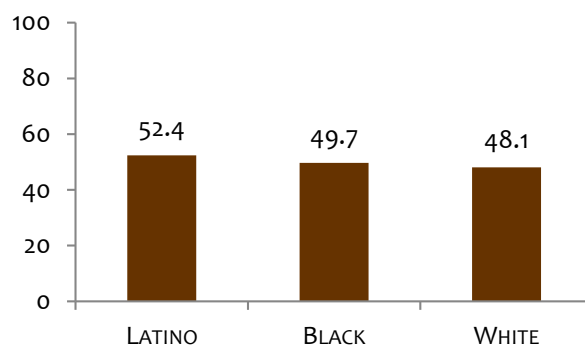


Figure 7 Percentage of students who have not talked with friends about going to college

LATINO PARENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR POSTSECONDARY PLANS

In addition to individual attitudes and beliefs, family (i.e. parents) plays a critical role in Latino male educational decisions. In particular, we examine key parent characteristics to develop a portrait of the

individuals that shape the Latino males' lives and educational decisions. The rationale to examine Latino families more closely follows earlier work focused on the role of Latino families in education (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010).

Therefore it is critical to understand the demographic profile of today's Latino families to better understand the different facets of Latino males' family structure. Next, we explore Latino family's level of participation in school activities. The extant research literature highlights that Latino families are less likely to actively engage in their child's educational experiences based on cultural differences (Carrasquillo & London, 1993; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010; Valdes, 1996). Finally, we explore parents' financial support for their child's postsecondary plans. We believe these survey results provide additional insights on the educational experiences of ninth grade male students in American high schools.

PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2009 HSLs survey asked parents/guardians of ninth grade students to provide information about their demographic characteristics, educational achievement, employment status, and school related questions about their child. For many of the Latino male students, their parents were not born in this country, most had not attended a postsecondary institution, and some did not currently hold a job.

Between the three primary male ethnic groups, Latino males (39.5 and 32.6 percent) were more likely compared to Black (6.6 and 6.6 percent) and White male students (13.3 and 3.6 percent) to have parents/guardians born in another country (see figure 8).

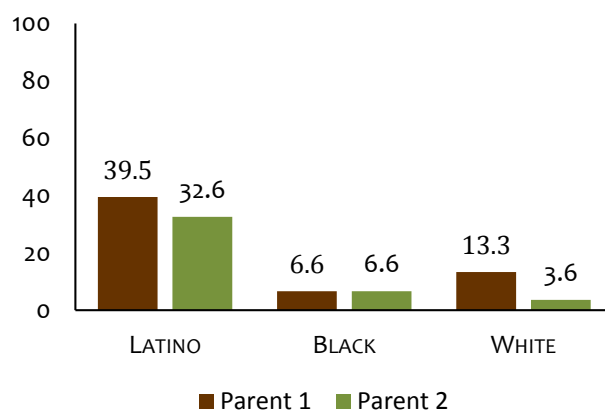


Figure 8 Percentage of primary parent/guardian born in another country

Between all parent groups, the educational level of Latino parents trailed significantly behind other parents. Latino parents (i.e. the primary parent) were the least likely to have earned a high school diploma or GED (30.9 and 25.3 percent) than any other degree type (e.g. Associate's, Bachelor's, or greater) (see figure 9).

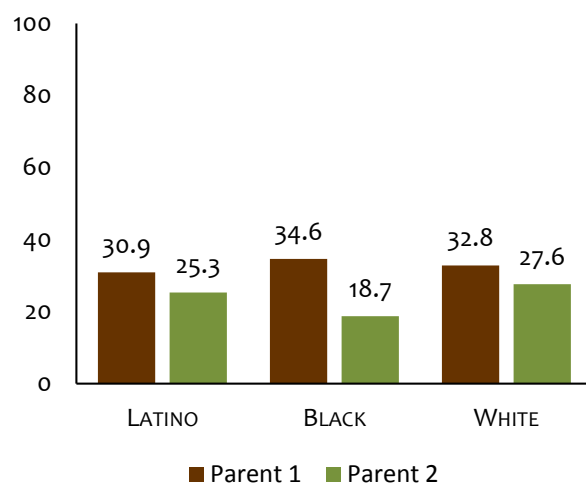


Figure 9 Percentage of primary parent/guardian with a high school/GED degree

The employment status of Latino parents/guardians offers another snapshot on the Latino family. Similar to parental educational levels, the employment status of Latino families were significantly different for Latino parents/guardians. Latino males' parents (24.2 and 15 percent) were more likely than Black males' parents (22.6 and 9.4 percent) and White parents (17.8 and 10.1 percent) to **not** have currently a job (see figure 10).

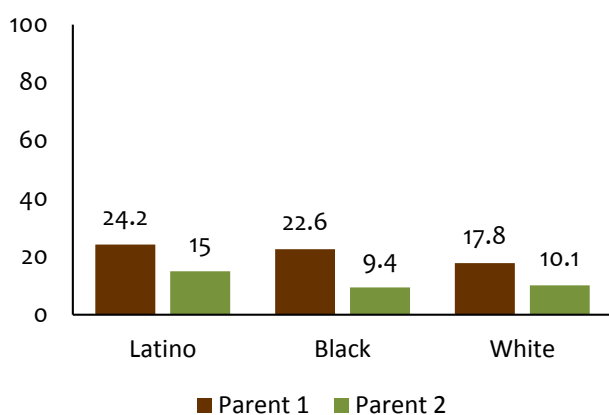


Figure 10 Percentage of parents that do not have currently a job

Finally, Latino families are less likely than White families to own their home (36.4 and 59.4 percent, respectively). This also seems to correlate to family income levels. That is, according to the 2009 HSLS parent survey, Latino families compared to other families have the largest percentage of families that earn less than 35,000 or less (see fast fact #3).

FACT #3 FAMILY INCOME \$35,000 OR LESS	
Family group	percentage
LATINOS	36.8%
BLACKS	35.0%
WHITES	14.1%

LATINO FAMILY'S PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Upon closer examination of parental involvement in the student's high school activities, we found that Latino families were less informed about postsecondary planning. For example, Latino parents (48.1 percent) compared to Black parents (32.1) and White parents (39.9) had **not** talked with a counselor/teacher about postsecondary admissions requirements (see figure 11).

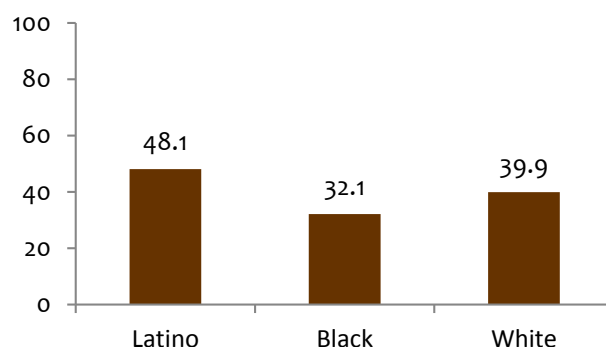


Figure 11 Percentage of parents who have not talked with a counselor/teacher about postsecondary admission requirements

PARENTAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILD'S POSTSECONDARY PLANS

An examination of the parental financial support yields results that reflect current literature. In this study, Latino parents (38.4 percent) were less likely than Black parents (40.8 percent) and White parents (54.4 percent) to indicate that they plan to help their ninth grade child pay for postsecondary education (see figure 12).

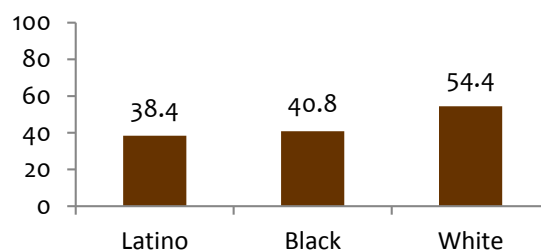


Figure 12 Percentage of parents who plan to help pay for postsecondary education

SCHOOL SAFETY CLIMATE CHARACTERISTICS

Contemporary public schools are notably different physical and social environments than they were 25 years ago. Particularly over the past decade, school safety has been and continues to be a significant concern of parents, school staff and administrators, and policy makers (Bracy, 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics' 2011 Indicators of School Crime and Safety report (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012) shows that students faced unsafe situations in their schools. For example, they found that "In 2009–10, about 74 percent of public schools recorded one or more violent incidents of crime, 16 percent recorded one or more serious violent incidents, and 44 percent recorded one or more thefts" (Robers et al., 2012, p. iii). A closer examination of school safety for male students reveals a greater likelihood of exposure to violent situations. Researchers found that in 2009, male students in grades 9–12 were twice as likely as females to report being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (Robers et al., 2012).

PHYSICAL CONFLICTS AND VANDALISM

The results for this section reflect survey data collected from school administrators' responses on five areas (e.g., personal safety, vandalism, alcohol and drug activity, bullying, and gang violence) of school safety. The findings from the survey suggest that Latino males (13.3 percent) compared White males (6.8 percent) witnessed twice as many physical conflicts between students at their high school at *least daily or once a week* (see figure 13).

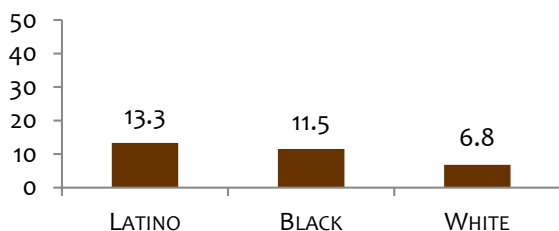


Figure 14 Percentage of students who witness physical conflicts among students

In addition, Latino male students (11.3 percent) were almost three times more likely than White male students (4.1 percent) to have vandalism at their respective high schools *at least daily or once a week* (see Figure 14).

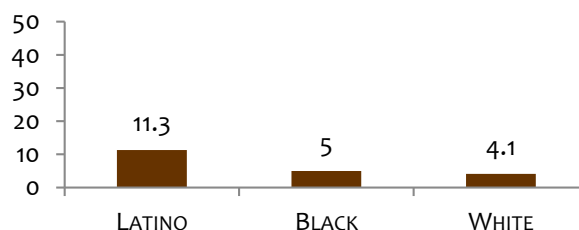


Figure 13 Percentage of students that reported vandalism in their high school

ALCOHOL AND ILLEGAL DRUG USE

Related to school safety, there were differences in reports about alcohol and drug abuse on high school campuses. In particular, Latino males (3.6 percent) are 2.5 more times likely than white male students (1.4 percent) to be in high schools that have incidents of student consuming alcohol on campus. Similarly, Latino male students (8.8 percent) compared to Black male students (6.1 percent) and White male students (6.5 percent) have daily or at least once a week incidents of illegal drug use on their high school campus.

BULLYING AND GANG VIOLENCE

Finally, Latino males are 3.5 times more likely than white males to experience gang violence at *least daily or once a week* in their high school. In addition, among ninth grade male groups, one in five students experience bullying at *least daily or once a week* in their high school (see fast fact #4).

FACT #4 BULLYING BEHAVIORS IN HIGH SCHOOL

Male student group	Experience at least daily or once a
LATINOS	20.1%
BLACKS	17.5%
WHITES	21.2%

CONCLUSION

The policy brief provides an honest portrait of the educational trends in American high schools for Latino boys. The 2009 HSLS survey provides ample evidence that Latino boys face significant barriers towards enrolling and participating in higher education.

Latino ninth grade boys, compared to their peers, have lower educational aspirations and little to no peer interaction to encourage the pursuit of a higher education career. Moreover, their college planning, compared to their peers seems overshadowed by financial obligations after high school. Coupled with these unique individual challenges, Latino boys come from families that are ill-equipped to address the complex and difficult barriers for successful transitions from high school to college. Immigrant parents seem unable to effectively navigate the demands of work and school engagement and are less likely to support college going plans. Finally, Latino male students, compared to their peers, attend high schools with unsafe climates. These counterproductive climates provide an educational context that may hinder or inhibit Latino male students' ability to focus on pathways to college participation.

As the research project title states, Latino boys are “boys in peril” and the policy brief’s empirical evidence supports the previous research with current nationally representative survey results. Although these are selected results, they portray a bleak future for Latino males in American education. To address this silent crisis, we provide recommendations that complement the qualitative findings and advance the discussion on Latino males’ educational pathways to high education. As mentioned earlier, we hope this policy brief will *inform, engage, inspire, and empower* stakeholders to focus on Latino males. The recommendations on the next page highlight initial thoughts focused on specific key stakeholders. We believe these recommendations are starting points to directly address the unique challenges that Latino males face in American education. We remain hopeful that Latino males will increase their participation in higher education and positively contribute to the American workforce and economic prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STAKEHOLDER	ACTION STEPS
LATINO FAMILIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform parents about the college application process during the ninth grade • Engage parents in financial aid discussions in the first year not the fourth year of high school • Inspire parents to visit their high school with a personal invitation to meet school teachers, counselors, and leaders • Empower parents to become partners with high schools address the potential barriers
HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS/COUNSELORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform teachers and counselors about culturally sensitive issues related to Latino males • Engage teachers to focus on helping Latino students develop educational aspirations for college enrollment • Inspire counselors to develop innovative peer mentoring programs focused on college planning • Empower counselors to develop a school climate focused on creating a college going culture to create a safe space for education
HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform high school administrators about the silent crises at the national level for Latino males in their high schools • Engage administrators through collaborations with counselors and teachers to focus on Latino male educational success • Inspire administrators to focus on male students of color, especially Latino males • Empower administrators to reduce school violence and improve school safety
SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform school district leaders about the national trends regarding boys of color educational aspirations and college planning behaviors Consider revising • Engage school district leaders with Latino families and Latino communities to address challenges unique to Latino boys • Inspire school district leaders to prioritize their efforts on low-income Latino families • Empower school district leaders to develop district policies focused on reducing school violence

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