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# Success of Latino High School Students in South Bend

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## Introduction

This research explores the success and achievement of Latino students at Catholic high schools in St. Joseph County, Indiana. We originally broached this topic in response to concerns raised by the staff at St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend, combined with a general interest in Latino education. We saw that, historically, Latino students in South Bend and Mishawaka as a whole do not reach desired achievement levels. Rather, they are underachieving, and the staff at St. Adalbert Parish initially attributed this to cultural differences and Latino identity. We explore these ideas through our research.

It is important to note that this research deals with a very complex issue. Education and achievement are very general concepts to measure, and many factors contribute to different results. The recommendations we offer at the end of this brief are just some ideas that may help based on our opinions of Latino high school students in South Bend, but we cannot accurately promise a change based on the implementation of any of these recommendations.

The purpose of this research was to focus on Latino high school students at two Catholic institutions in the South Bend area: St. Joseph's High School and Marian High School. We hoped that, by learning what students expect to achieve in high school and

who they aspire to become in the future, we can determine what more they need from their schools and community in order to reach these dreams. We explored the barriers and challenges that prevent students from their success. We examined why Latino students are underachieving relative to their white peers and the extent to which cultural and structural barriers undermine the success of these students. Additionally, because we believe their perspective on identity to be an important factor in their success, we touch upon issues of identity and how the students choose to employ these separate cultures (American, Latino, Catholic, etc.) in their daily lives.

We based our research largely on a detailed student survey, small focus group discussion, and individual interviews. These incorporate topics such as language use, importance of academics, self-segregation, friend groups, and academic system knowledge. It is also necessary to look at past research and beliefs regarding Latino student education and identity. To put this topic in context, it is equally important to attain a better understanding of the schooling system in South Bend and explore their resources, programs, aid, and opportunities for Latino students, and then evaluate how they can be improved.



# Education in the United States

Children in the United States follow a schooling pattern that involves five or six years of early education, otherwise known as elementary school; followed typically by a middle school or junior high school for three years; and, finally a high school or senior high school education for three or four years before graduating and moving on to postgraduate opportunities. This educational progression is mandatory in most states.

Specific schooling structures vary from state to state because the system is decentralized. School districts make up the organized mini-structures in each state. While the federal government has somewhat of a voice in the overall education system in the United States, local governments make many specific decisions on curriculum, requirements, schedules, and offerings (“USNEI”).

School districts are made up by public schools. While parents do have the right to homeschool their children, another free option lies in public school education. Partially funded by tax dollars, public schools provide free transportation and schooling for students living in their district. The school system has been complicated recently, as other schooling options have been made available in response to questionable success rates and great achievement gaps. Alternative schools have initiated the effort to close this gap and provide more individualized programs catered to students’ differing needs. These alternative schools include magnet, charter, and vocational school options. Many states have adopted a voucher system, providing school children with the opportunity to switch to a more suitable school for free when it would normally have tuition. Private schools are also included in these lists, though they are not new but have been popular choices for families throughout history (“The Notre Dame Education Task Force”).

Once an educational powerhouse, the United States has fallen in global education rankings, and, more importantly, it is failing to educate students. The failure of the school system to educate American children is resulting in a youth that, for once, may be less certain of their career prospects than their parents and that, consequently, is less prepared for the future. Experts claim that by 2018, 63 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary degree (“National Conference of State Legislatures”), making it that much more essential to find a path for success for our students. Fortunately, recent attempts to create national standardized schooling objectives that promote college preparedness have been fruitful. Indiana adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a state-led effort to further student education in English

and mathematics in preparation for a college education, on August 3, 2010, and expects to have fully implemented the program by the 2014-15 school year (“National Governors Association Center for Best Practices”). The CCSS Initiative is helping schools provide an equal level of education for students in schools across the forty-five participating states.

Various programs and curriculums such as the



Common Core State Standards Initiative, as mentioned, founded on sound research with past and present practices in mind and the collaboration of students, parents, and educators, are in the process of being established. A significant percentage of students, however, continue to fail. Currently, the Indiana Department of Education has set a goal for Indiana schools to achieve 90 25 90 in each graduating class (“Indiana Department of Education”). This achievement requires 90 percent of students to pass state exams, 25 percent of students to pass at least one AP exam (or an equivalent), and 90 percent of students to graduate from high school. The third objective is of utmost importance. While slow progress is expected due to the nature of education, it is necessary for the U.S. Department of Education to not give up on any student—it would, under the current proposal, allow 10 percent of Indiana students to leave the state’s education system without their high school credentials. The issue is particularly alarming for Latinos because they continue to underachieve in comparison to their White, Black, and Asian peers, as indicated by their lower levels of educational attainment (Guzman, *et. al.* 2011:29). These numbers translate into a statistical expectation for a larger percentage (in comparison to the Latino population of Indiana) of Latino students to fall through the cracks of the Indiana educational system.

*Definition: For the purposes of this brief, the terms Latino and Hispanic will be used interchangeably to describe individuals with origins in Latin America.*

## Latino Education in the United States

Because the majority of Latinos are of Mexican descent (65 percent in the United States, 80 percent in South Bend), we will use many scholarly and non-scholarly sources that focus on Latinos to speak of the Mexican experience, while acknowledging that all Latinos are not Mexican. The Hispanic population in the United States

increased from 12.5 percent Hispanic in 2000 to 16.3 in 2010. Additionally, Hispanics accounted for 43.0 percent of the population change within the decade. The Hispanic population of Indiana increased from 3.5 percent in 2000 to 6.0 percent in 2010. This is equivalent to an 81.7 percent increase in the Latino population of the state (“United States Census Bureau”). A similar and significant population shift is eminent in South Bend, where the Hispanic population increased from 3.0 percent in 1990 to 8.45 percent in 2000 to 12.96 percent in 2010. Hispanics of Mexican origin comprise 65 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States, while Hispanics of Mexican origin make up 78 percent of the Hispanic population in Indiana (Guzman, *et. al.* 2011:12).

Hispanics now make up a quarter of all United States public school students, although Hispanics constitute only 9.0 percent of the public school population in Indiana. Nationally on the SAT, the average Mexican American student receives a score of 468 on the writing section and a score of 468 on the mathematics section; the average student nationally receives a score of 489 and 514, respectively; and a white student receives a score of 516 and 535, respectively (“National Center for Education Statistics”). Thus, there is a significant achievement gap on the SAT between Mexican American students and their white peers. We can observe these figures in light of educational attainment for Mexican Americans and conclude that there is a gap in the quality of education they are receiving if these students are not able to achieve scores comparable to those of their peers. The Hispanic high school dropout rate continues to fall, reaching a record low of 15 percent in 2012 from 32 percent in 2000 (“Pew Hispanic”). Yet it remains the highest dropout rate by race and ethnicity when compared with Whites, Blacks, and Asians. The high Latino dropout rate has resulted in Latinos representing only 3.6 percent of the students attending public universities in Indi-



ana (“National Conference of State Legislatures”).

Even with increased efforts and successes, Hispanics are failing to keep up with their White, Black, and Asian peers academically. Some may point to structural, cultural, and economic barriers as causes for the achievement gap between Hispanics and other students. Hispanic youth must face the challenges of low

socioeconomic status, documentation-related restraints, and language barriers. The poverty rate for Hispanic youth in Indiana is 41 percent. Up to 1.7 million undocumented students were estimated to potentially benefit from the deferred action program established by President Barack Obama. Additionally, of the two-thirds of the Hispanic population in Indiana born in the U.S., it is estimated that only one-third employ the use of the English language within the home (“Pew Hispanic”).

Latinos are making strides nevertheless. Only 61 percent of adult Latinos in Indiana had graduated from high school in 2010, while 88 percent of whites and 83 percent of blacks had done so. The class of 2011 in Indiana’s public schooling system had a high school graduation rate of 81 percent for Latinos, 88 percent for whites, and 75 percent for blacks (“State of Indiana”). Recently, the percentage of Hispanic high school graduates enrolling in college surpassed that of whites by a margin of 2.0 percent. The college graduation rate of Latinos in Indiana was 47.5 percent compared to 53.5 percent for whites. However, it continues to be a fact that only 14.5 percent of Latinos ages 25 and older have earned a college degree, while 51 percent of Asians, 34.5 percent of whites and 21.2 percent of blacks have done so. It also continues to be true that Hispanic students are less likely than whites to enroll in a four-year college, attend a selective college, and enroll full-time (“Pew Hispanic”). Continued failure will not only be a detriment to the nation as a whole, but will largely undermine the lifestyles and education of succeeding generations. The weakness of the education system, thus, is of particular concern, as it speaks to the future generation’s ability to improve its economic outlook (Guzman, *et. al.* 2011:3), especially when discussing Latinos.

# Catholicism, Schooling, and Latinos



Latino children need and deserve the **Catholic School Advantage**



Catholic schools are just one distinction of private schools. Catholic schools specifically have a reputation for providing a wholesome, respectable education to students. Parents appreciate Catholic schools because of the “moral framework” they provide for students (Guzman, Palacios, and Deliyannides 2012:56). This is especially relevant to Latinos because so many identify as Catholic. Out of the entire population of Catholics in the United States, it is estimated that one third are Latino. In the 2009-10 school year, Latinos in Catholic primary and secondary schools only made up 12.8 percent of students (50).

Parents also feel that students receive more individualized attention and care at Catholic schools. They believe that academically, Catholic schools are superior. Price, transportation conflicts, and volunteer requirements, however, do inhibit Latino parents’ ability and willingness to send their children to Catholic schools

(59). Overall, Latino families conclude that if cost and other requirements were not at issue, they would choose to send their children to Catholic schools (60).

Regardless of Latino enrollment versus white enrollment, Catholic schools across the United States are closing. Over 1,400 Catholic schools have closed since 2000, while the Catholic Latino population is growing quickly. Additionally, case studies concluded that Latino students would be 42.0 percent more likely to graduate from high school if they attended Catholic school, and two and a half times more likely to graduate from college. The University of Notre Dame has countered these facts and created the “Catholic School Advantage,” a plan to increase the percentage of Latinos in Catholic schools from 3.0 percent to 6.0 percent by 2020 (“The Notre Dame Education Task Force”). Thus, according to our research, one important piece of Latino success is attendance at Catholic schools. Because our study focuses on two Catholic high schools, the next step is to ask, what more is hindering these Latino students?

## St. Joe’s Mission Statement:

“Saint Joseph High School is a Catholic secondary school dedicated to transforming students in heart and mind, preparing them to serve God, the Church and the world.”

## Marian Mission Statement:

“Marian High School challenges students to spiritual and moral growth, academic and physical excellence, and social maturity. As a Catholic community, Marian values the sanctity and individuality of each student and strives to live the example of Jesus Christ as teacher and servant.”

## High Schools in St. Joseph County

South Bend and Mishawaka both exist within the limits of St. Joseph County in Indiana. South Bend is home to twelve schools offering education at the high school level. Seven of these schools are strictly high schools, only spanning grades nine to twelve. The remaining five also serve younger students. Of the seven high schools, only one is Catholic (“Schools in South Bend, Indiana”). The neighboring city of Mishawaka contains just five high schools, one of which is a private Catholic institution (“St. Joseph County, Indiana (IN)”).

Saint Joseph’s and Marian High Schools are, respectively, South Bend and Mishawaka’s only Catholic high

schools. Both schools offer comprehensive education and enrichment programs.

Both schools are traditionally Catholic in their curriculums and practices: students are instructed in religion, required to participate in service, and expected to thrive academically. Students are also offered many extracurricular activities and assistance in counseling and future planning. Both schools are considered to be among the top schools in Indiana; their students are highly successful as a whole (“Marian High School”) (“Quick Facts and Highlights”). However, even at these respected institutions, an achievement gap between Latino students and white students remains.

## Parental Involvement and Mentoring Programs for At-Risk Youth in South Bend

Latino students tend to come from low-income families and have parents with low educational attainment. Consequently, Latino families are able to offer only limited resources. Parental involvement is important to the educational enrichment of students and is a factor in their success. It encompasses a range of necessary responsibilities including school-related involvement such as parent-teacher conferences, organizations, and volunteering, and home-based involvement, such as assisting students with homework and discussing school-related matters with them, including motivating students and supporting their college decisions (Pomerantz, *et. al.* 2007:393). Schools and teachers that ask for parental involvement and attentiveness often do not understand that for a lot of Latino parents, it is difficult to be involved to the same degree as other parents due to their frequent lack of education and limited grasp of the English language. The parental involvement of Latinos, specifically those of Mexican descent, is founded on motivating their children to succeed in school through conversations on how they do not want their children to work in low-wage, manual jobs like they have had to (Altschul 2011:161). Because parental involvement of this form is not visible to schools and teachers, Latino parents are labeled as uninvolved or careless. Even though a lot of Latino parents are not able to help their children directly, they make efforts to indirectly aid their children's education. One way Latino parents do this is by encouraging their students to participate in after school mentoring programs.

In many cities across the country, programs exist to help students of poor backgrounds achieve educational milestones. In the city of South Bend, there are many such non-school affiliated programs available through organizations and independent entities. Prominent programs include Adelante at La Casa de Amistad, tutoring at the Robinson Community Learning Center, Upward Bound in the South Bend area, and the 21st Century Scholars program throughout Indiana. As they are often the first in their families to aim for college, Latino students in South Bend rely on these programs to supplement their education and balance the lack of resources at home.

La Casa provides a location for the Adelante after-school program, which targets middle and high school students. As part of the League of United Latin American Citizens's (LULAC) ¡Adelante! American

Youth Leadership Programs, the program "works with Latino youth to cultivate optimism, build resilience, and improve academic skills" ("League of United Latin American Citizens"). Monday through Wednesday sessions are devoted to tutoring, while on Thursdays students participate in Mentorship, a weekly meeting between the Adelante students and Notre Dame's MEChA members. La Casa describes the program as having a concentration in bilingualism and biculturalism that coincides with their mission to empower the Latino community of South Bend. Their 2012 Annual Report states that 125 students registered for the course and 78 of those students successfully finished the course ("La Casa de Amistad").



The Robinson Community Learning Center also hosts a tutoring program for students ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Volunteers from the community provide basic homework help. As a center established through the University of Notre Dame, it possesses great resources and individuals that support South Bend students with a mission driven by hospitality, education, and partnership ("Robinson Community Learning Center").

The Upward Bound program, a collaboration between local high school personnel and agencies and the University of Notre Dame, provides academic support to a group of about one hundred students. Most students in the program are academically adept and come from low-income families and homes where neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. These students are typically from four target schools (Adams High School, Clay High School, Riley High School, and Washington High

School), though students from other schools in the area are also allowed to participate. U.S. citizenship is required for program participation in most cases, and thus Upward Bound is more exclusive than other programs in the community. The program provides a holistic approach to academic instruction and encompasses such benefits as tutoring, counseling, and mentoring. Students are required to participate in weekly workshops that provide a solid foundation for them to prepare for and succeed in college. Workshop topics include areas like testing, admissions, and financial aid. There is even a summer academy in place where students live and learn at Notre Dame. Upward Bound boasts a 100 percent high school graduation rate and a nearly perfect postsecondary education enrollment rate (“TRiO Programs”).

The statewide 21st Century Scholars program facilitates the possibility of higher education for the youth of Indiana. The program ensures that academically eligible students who take the 21st Century Scholar Pledge attend college. Students must commit to the pledge in either the 7th or 8th grade, maintain a 2.5 GPA throughout high school, and enroll in an eligible Indiana college (State of Indiana). Students must be U.S. citizens and fall under an income maximum in order to successfully enroll in the program. As college students, these scholars also have the opportunity to participate in support programs provided through 21st Century Scholars.

Community efforts in South Bend also provide support for students. For example, Radio Sabor Latino, a local Spanish language radio station, provides scholarships to South Bend high school graduates (“Radio Sabor Latino”). Their considerate attentiveness to South Bend youth is visible even in their official website,

which provides various links to educational content for children through sites such as Thinkquest, Fun Brain, and Khan Academy.

As a final note on parental involvement and the success of students, it is important to acknowledge that “parent expectations have the greatest measurable effect



on children’s educational attainment” (Pantoja 2005:22). The range of parental perspectives on their student’s achievements, from complacency to disappointment, affects the student’s efforts and milestones. Because of the inconsistency of parental perspectives within groups of parents with similar backgrounds, it is difficult to observe a clear pattern between the two variables. Among immigrant parents, for example, there is division between complacency and the ‘drive of immigrants.’ Many such parents simply value the fact that their child is receiving an education and are satisfied with whatever level of education is attained, while other parents pressure their children to do as much as possible so that they will have more opportunities in the future.

## Identity and Latinos

Identity is an important part of an individual's development and lifestyle. Thus, it is important to explore in discussing Hispanic student success. Of Hispanics living in the United States, 24 percent describe themselves as Hispanic or Latino, 51 percent describe themselves based on their family's country of origin, and 21 percent describe themselves as American. Aside from different views on categorization, 69 percent of Hispanics acknowledged that U.S. Hispanics have different cultures, while 29 percent considered U.S. Hispanics to share a common culture. Regardless of this, however, 47 percent of Hispanics regarded themselves

as typical Americans, while an equal percent considered themselves very different from the typical American (“Pew Hispanic”). Language is also an important component to this idea of identity. It decisively limits who comprises the ‘in-group’. An overwhelming 87 percent of Hispanics believe adult Hispanic immigrants need to learn English to succeed in the U.S., and an even greater percentage, 95 percent, consider it important for future generations of U.S. Hispanics to be able to speak Spanish (*ibid*).

There are still other important and interesting aspects to identity. Religious affiliation, for example,

Do you think adult Hispanic immigrants need to learn English to succeed in the U.S.?



How important is it to you that future generations of Hispanics living in the U.S. be able to speak Spanish?



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tends to be more cultural than religious or spiritual. The Catholic church is recognized as an authoritarian agent that a child is expected to openly receive rather than to question (De La Vega 1974:6). The unique 1986 research of Benson and Yeager in another example asked students to rate the importance of several goals in a study that investigated the priorities of youth in the U.S. Hispanics ranked 'to have a happy family life' first, then 'to have a good job when I am older', followed by 'to have God at the center of my life' and 'to do my best in school' (Pantoja 2005:32). Benson and Yeager's results show that while a career and education are important, family continues to be at the center of a Hispanic's life.

Identity influences a wide range of perceptions, emotions, beliefs, and customs that are expressed behaviorally and which allow for firmly established sentiments such as a sense of belonging and self-esteem or the opposite, a sense of marginality and alienation (Bernal, *et al.* 2005:19). Individuals belonging to minority groups contend with acculturation to the mainstream majority culture alongside preservation of their ancestral culture. The reality of this idea of the 'American people' being white has served to assimilate certain immigrant populations and exclude others (Basch, *et al.* 1994:40). An ethnic child's identity is, thus, "molded and remolded as a joint product of ethnic group socialization experiences and interactions with the dominant culture" (Bernal, *et al.* 2005:77). Depending on the impact of these experiences and the child's adjustments to the dominant culture, distinctive identities are created.

There are two important things to recognize about identity. Identity is a cultural product and is by no means natural. Identities, contrary to popular beliefs, are not unchanging but rather fluid and contextualized. Nevertheless, it is common for identity to be thought of as fixed. This results in individuals' being positioned under certain categories without possibility of transcending this image. Often, identities of differentiation are "constructed by dominant powers or in resistance to

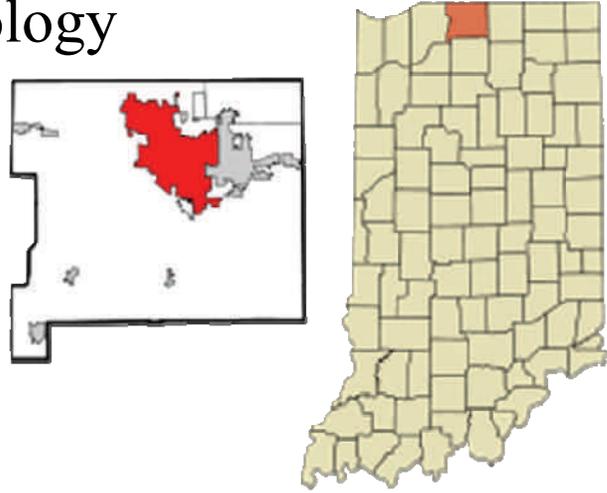
them" (Basch, *et al.* 1994:32). In the United States, for example, the term Hispanic is used to group together people with historical links to Spain and, more particularly, Latin American countries. Likewise, the term Latino is used as an umbrella term for all peoples of Latin American descent. The existence of these ethnic groups allows the country to distinguish between non-Hispanic whites and Hispanic whites, as Hispanic itself is not considered a race.

Adding to the complexity, an individual can produce or utilize several identities, choosing which identity to express or represent is simply a circumstantial matter. A person can be a Hispanic, a Catholic, a student, and a female all at the same time or each one intermittently. To some individuals it may become an issue of which identity is most beneficial to employ, while other occasions might render disassociation with a certain identity to be inevitable. They inhibit and liberate the individual to a different degree depending on the environment. There is an added emphasis on the power of language, nationality, and ethnic background when discussing identity due to the dynamic processes that influence its formation. In the context of Hispanic high school students in South Bend, it can be observed that there is a hyper-exposure to identity. Because there is "no single culture of the home, nor [is] there a single culture of the school" (Romo, *et al.* 1996:190), each individual student, often the child of immigrants (and at times an immigrant him or herself), must struggle with forming a unique identity that balances both the American and Latino cultures.

A Latino student's educational success may, accordingly, depend largely on their concept of identity. Behaviorally, Haitian youth are "finding ways to 'fit in' socially, and through education to advance economically" (Stepick, *et al.* 2009). Nevertheless, the Haitian youth continues, as observed by their self-labeling, to preserve their home country beliefs and values. This indicates that it is important for youth to be proud of both their national and transnational identity whilst comprising the in-group at school, though more weight is given to perceptions of the former. We can view Stepick's research in light of the Latino youth experiences in South Bend and state that, essentially, a sense of belonging in both the home and school cultures is necessary for success.

# Methodology

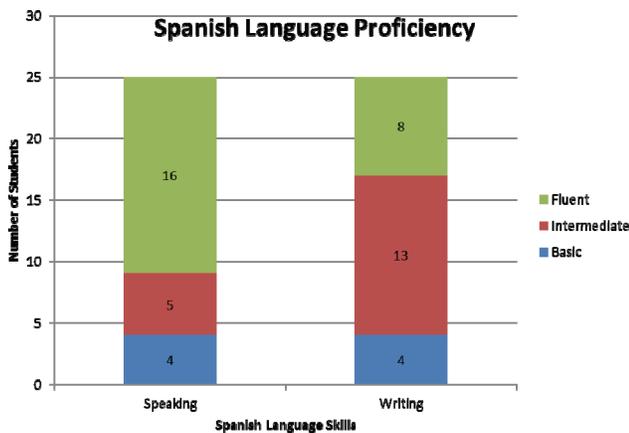
Our research included the administration of a survey we created in collaboration with St. Adalbert's Parish staff. The survey asked Latino students attending St. Joe's and Marian High Schools to answer general questions about their identity and education in sections on Basic Information, Family, School, and Culture. Of the 25 students surveyed, four are male and 21 are female, and eight attend St. Joe's while 17 attend Marian. Four students are 9<sup>th</sup> graders, seven are 10<sup>th</sup> graders, nine are 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and five are 12<sup>th</sup> graders. In the analysis of our data, we chose to collectively look at all students as if they were of the same gender, attending the same school.



# Findings

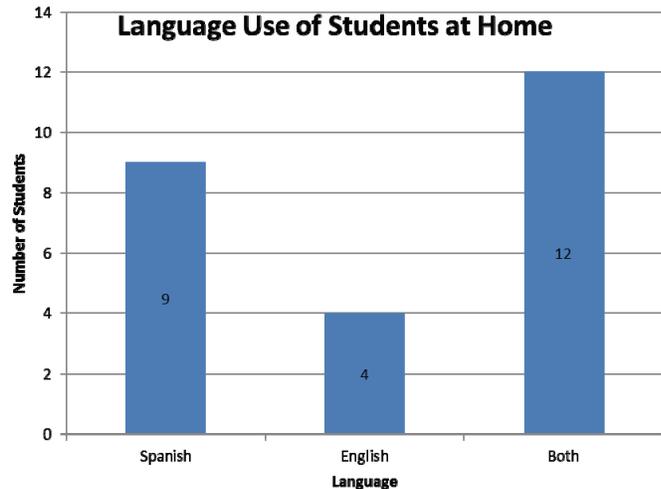
## Basic Identification Information

All students surveyed identified themselves not only as Latino but also as Mexican and, furthermore, Catholic. As mentioned previously in our discussion of identity, language is an important component of identity. In our survey, all students claimed to have at least a basic knowledge of the Spanish language in regards to both speaking and writing. 36.0 percent stated they speak only Spanish at home and 48.0 percent said they



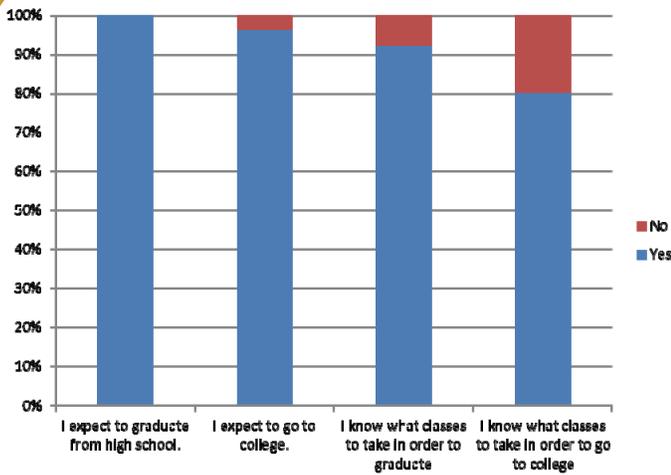
speak both English and Spanish at home. Just because most students are able to speak Spanish and many use some level of Spanish in the home, does not mean that they employ its usage at school. One female student from Marian High School claimed that she has been ridiculed for using Spanish in school, and that her peers do not respond well to Spanish use. In the eyes of the students, this negativity suppresses their desires to expose

their identity. The ability and use of language is crucial to the success of students as “the choice of language is frequently a sign of in-group identity, ethnicity, and soli-



arity...it can be used to include or exclude an individual” (Avitia and Monterrubio 2009:9). These findings are significant because if Latino students feel excluded at school, they are already at a disadvantage. Comfort is essential for student success, and self-identity and perception is a large part of such comfort. University of Notre Dame Professor Maria McKenna agrees that keeping a positive sense of self “will likely increase a person’s chances of success academically and a person’s ability to persist in the face of difficulty” (McKenna 2013).

Religion is also an important component of identity. 96.0 percent of students claimed to have become



percent claimed a need to go to college, and 88.0 percent claimed they would feel failure if they were unable to attend college. In contrast, only 60.0 percent of our students said they feel prepared for college. Nevertheless, 92.0 percent of students claimed to know which classes they need to take in order to graduate high school, while only 80.0 percent stated they know which classes to take in order to go to college. In regards to specific college preparation, 84.0 percent of students have met with their counselor in the past year, but only 32.0 percent participate in a college preparation program.

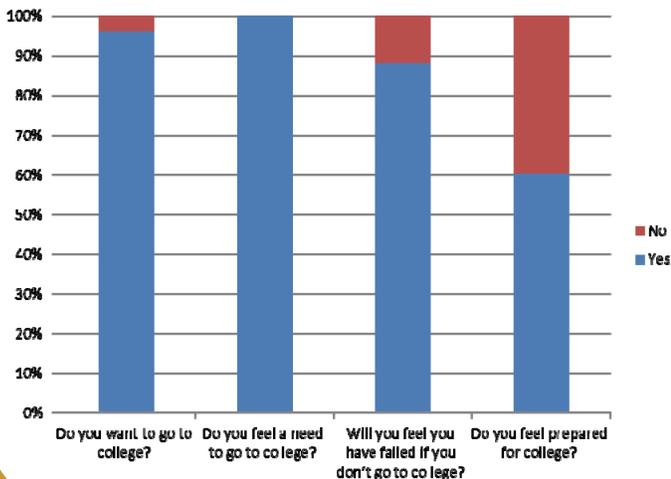
better Catholics through their attendance at Catholic high schools, though the extent of this ‘improvement’ is subject to the perception of each individual student. Nevertheless, this involvement is important in Latino success as a dedication to Catholicism offers “a supportive community and form[s] an extended family of sorts” for the students (Prot, *et al.* 2008:4). The staff at Saint Adalbert Parish pointedly aids Latino students in leadership and exposure to universities, so it is important that the youth feel a connection to this community, and this seems to be effectively done through their schooling. Three students interviewed also claimed that they felt attending Catholic school would help them get into college, which is in line with the University of Notre Dame’s opinions previously discussed in regards to the “Catholic School Advantage” (“The Notre Dame Education Task Force”).

It is important to note that not all students surveyed were juniors or seniors, but a relatively even mix of all grades. This could be the reason that there are not more students in a college preparation program. Regardless, there is a disconnect between knowledge on graduation versus knowledge on college preparation. These findings are comparable to studies done of Latino students across the country. A study by the *Journal of Latinos and Education* claims that the transition from high school to college for Latino students is most difficult when there is a lack of “academic ethic” instilled in their education (Martinez-Ramos, Pino, and Smith 2012:19). If Latinos are not motivated, persistent, disciplined, and responsible in controlling their own academic success, they may not receive the correct attention guiding them to college. Additionally, their lack of comfort in school, as discussed earlier, may hinder their confidence in pushing themselves and seeking help when they need it. It is possible that the confidence of Latino students declines because “Latinos...have become increasingly isolated over the past 30 years” and perhaps they do not feel supported in the process (18).

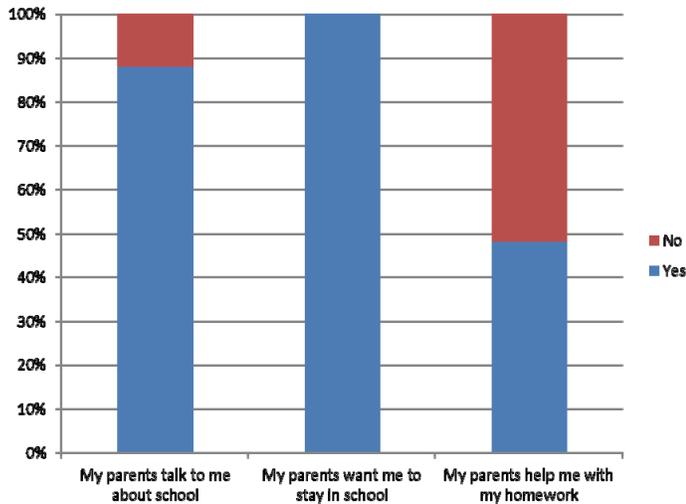
**Schooling for Latinos**

100.0 percent of students expected to graduate from high school and 96.0 percent of students expected to enroll in postsecondary studies. In an extension of questions regarding student views on college, 96.0 percent of students claimed to want to go to college, 100.0

The students surveyed do seem to be aware that academics are not the only part of a college application. In more specific questions regarding college preparation, 96.0 percent of students surveyed said that they believe participation in extracurricular activities will help them get into college. However, only 64.0 percent actually participate in extracurricular activities. Additionally, 40.0 percent participate in school sports, but 80.0 percent claim that they believe participation in school sports will help them get into college. These students are aware of what makes for a strong college application but are not actively pushing themselves to be at that level. It is likely that they realize that “participation in...extracurricular activities is associated with increased educational achievement and attainment, reduced problem behavior, improved attitudes toward educational and occupational goals, positively influenced psychological adjustment, and decreased likelihood of dropping out” (Peguero 2011:19). More questions can be raised regarding extra-



curricular activities. The fact that not all students participate in extracurricular activities could be identified as a cultural difference. It is likely that counselors and school administrators have told students they should be involved in activities outside of school, and that it will help them get into college. However, the reasons that disallow students to participate in other activities could vary. Only 36.0 percent claimed to have transportation conflicts with participation in these activities, but lack of available funds is also recognized as a problem. Perhaps students place academics higher in their ranking of priorities, but ultimately, identity can again be raised as a con-



cern. If students are not comfortable existing in their school environments, and feel as though they are excluded, they will not actively seek extracurricular activities where they feel they will already be outsiders.

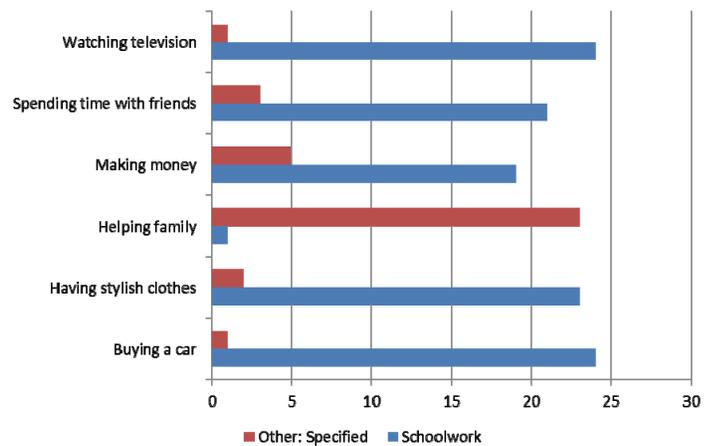
**Latinos and Family**

Students commented on their parents’ involvement in their education. 88.0 percent claimed their parents talked to them about school; 100.0 percent claimed they felt their parents wanted them to stay in school; and 48.0 percent claimed their parents helped them with their homework. Due to the largely uneducated percentage of parents in our study, it is understandable that many of the students’ parents are unable to help them with school assignments. These parents experience “economic, social, cultural, and linguistic barriers to engaging with schools” (Altschul 2011:160) that do not allow them to establish their presence in a strictly scholarly environment. True to the findings of Altschul, the parents of our students are more visibly involved through holding high expectations and motivational conversations. Education is viewed by many parents as the only way to overcome their current socioeconomic conditions. The fact that all of our students attend a private, Catholic institution is very telling of the importance of education

to their families. Students themselves also understand the importance of education—one student goes as far as stating that education is necessary in order “to be someone and have a good career” (Anonymous 2013).

The issue in creating solutions for Latino education, given the diversity of the Latino population, is segmented assimilation, where not all children from comparable backgrounds assimilate similarly or achieve the same outcomes (Stepick, *et al.* 2010:1161). Returning to the topic of parent levels of education, though there are “well-established relationships between parental education and academic performance on such outcomes as grades, drop out rates, and achievement tests” (Suarez-Orozco, *et al.* 2011:175), it is the mother’s education in particular that plays a significant role in a student’s success. From our student pool, for example, 25 parents have less than a high school education, 18 parents have high school credentials, and seven parents had at least some college education. Of the 18 parents with high school credentials, however, 11 of the parents were mothers, and of the seven parents with a college education six were mothers. It is expected then, according to Suarez-Orozco, that the surveyed students with mothers

**Student Priorities**



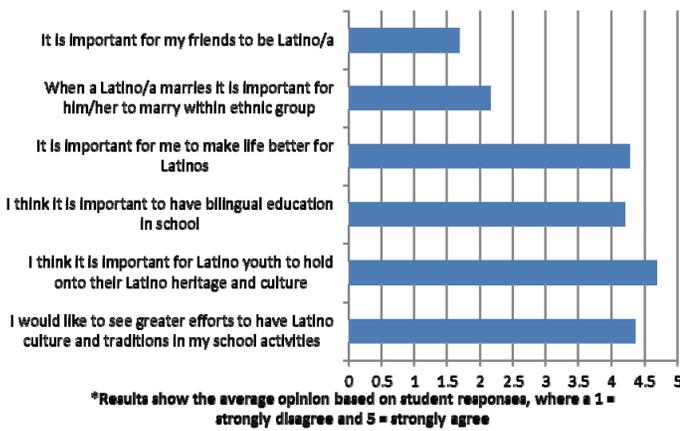
who have higher levels of education will be able to achieve more than the students whose mothers do not have high levels of education.

In organizing priorities, most students claimed to place schoolwork above buying a car, having stylish clothes, making money, spending time with friends, and watching television. Again, education is prized above material good and actions of instant gratification. There was an exception, however, as 92.0 percent of students stated they would rather help family than do school work. Family is categorized as being of utmost importance. This practice of placing family above educa-

tion correlates with Benson and Yeager’s findings stating Hispanic youth rank ‘a happy family life’ as being most important. The progress of the family as a whole takes greater weight than the success of the individual. Many students, for example, shared in the sentiment that money was a significant barrier to their future education. They worry that the cost of attendance may, and will, surpass the contributions their parents are able to afford. These worries over finances may have a hand in students having jobs while in high school. 20.0 percent of the surveyed students claimed to have a job, ranging from fast food cashiers to assistants. While having these jobs may help support the family economically and teach students responsibility, these jobs are time and energy consum-

tinous but did not express the need for increased interaction with Latinos. The type of education they appear to desire worked successfully in the Tucson Unified School District of the state of Arizona. Professor Marisel Moreno, a Romance Languages and Literature professor at Notre Dame, stated that students enrolled in the Mexican-American Studies Program "demonstrated significant improvement in their academic achievements simply by having been exposed to their cultural histories and artistic expressions at the hands of Mexican-American teachers". Unfortunately, the program has been prohibited under House Bill 2281 signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer in 2010. According to the bill, any public school program promoting anarchy, racial or class resentment, ethnic solidarity, or designed for a certain ethnicity would not be allowed (“Arizona State Legislature”). With a 93 percent high school graduation rate and 85 percent student college enrollment (“Dos Vatos Films”), the Tucson Unified School District presented a working model for the integration of a cultural component into secondary education. A similar model could potentially be proposed for St. Joe’s and Marian, but the relatively low Latino enrollment in these schools might serve as impediments to the establishment of such a program.

**Student Views on Culture**



ing. The effort that students with jobs are able to place on their academics is considerably diminished, and may be contributing to their poor academic success, though this may not be the case for all individuals.

**Latino Culture in Schools**

As a whole, students agreed that it is important to have bilingual education in school and it is important for the student, personally, to make life better for Latinos. Bilingual education is an objective that parents as well as students support. There are strong sentiments among the Latino community, as reported by the Pew Hispanic, for the preservation of the Spanish language among succeeding generations of Latinos. The grounding of Latino youth in family and solidarity is represented in their expressed desire to make life better for Latinos. There was a strong sentiment of agreement to see greater efforts to have Latino culture and traditions in school activities; the students also considered it important for Latino youth to hold onto their Latino heritage and culture.

Another trend in the survey results was a general disagreement with the idea of Latinos needing to marry within that ethnic group. Furthermore, students strongly disagreed that it was important for their friends to be Hispanic. Students felt that their culture is important but not an overarching, transcending factor when interacting with others. Students want to feel comfortable as students who belong in their school environments, drawing a parallel to Stepick’s findings about the need for a sense of belonging. Students generally suggested that if they are integrated into the ‘in group’ at school while maintaining their Latino culture and also comprising the ‘in group’ among their Latino acquaintances, they would be best positioned to succeed academically.

Overall, the students favored learning about La-

## Recommendations by Students

“When we keep entire communities—especially Latinos who are the largest US minority (50.5 million)—out of that greater narrative, we are making them invisible.” — Prof. Marisel Moreno

“I believe that if there were any Mexican or Mexican American faculty or staff, there would be more [student] involvement.” — Anonymous Student

We chose to interview students and seriously take their ideas into consideration because the true purpose of this research is to ultimately benefit them. Children are not passive. They have agency and may know better than anyone what is best for them.

### ACADEMICALLY:

In discussions with our students, we learned that they feel some disconnect with their teachers in certain classes. They seemed to have the most trouble with their English and Spanish classes, and informed us that the teachers do not teach in ways the students can understand. For the most part, the students are comfortable asking for help, but these students specifically cited they do not feel comfortable asking new teachers for help.

We discussed one specific example of such disconnect with the students. Many of these students are placed in a Spanish class called “Heritage.” Heritage is meant to help native Spanish speaking students improve the Spanish they already know. The schools are aware that the majority of Latino students enrolled are of Mexican descent, yet the Heritage teacher is familiar with traditional Spanish from Spain, not Mexican Spanish. The students we surveyed are very confused by this hiring decision, and are not benefitting from the class because of the linguistic differences. Overall, the students felt that more sensitive hiring decisions would benefit the academic portion of their education.

The students commented on the helpfulness of attending a Catholic institution as it harnesses their educational potential while allowing them “to grow in [their] relationship with Christ” (Anonymous 2013). Their involvement with Catholicism spread beyond the classroom requirements in theology courses. Many students claimed to attend mass weekly, participate in confession regularly, and work in campus ministry. While they agree that Catholic education benefits them, they also have many concerns regarding cost. These students want to go to college and recognize a need for good grades. They trust their schools to prepare them but have concerns about financing college. Although the students did not directly request more information on financial aid, it appears

most would benefit from learning more about the financial aid available at different public and private universities and colleges.

### CULTURALLY:

Our students almost unanimously agreed that they would like to see greater efforts to have Latino culture and traditions in their school activities. Specifically, events that promote and celebrate their Mexican and Latino roots were welcomed (Anonymous 2013). They also agreed that it is important for Latino youth to hold onto their Latino heritage and culture and felt that it is important for themselves to make life better for Latinos. However most students do not feel that it is important for their friends to be Latino. One student did, however, comment on the need to have a larger Mexican student population on campus; another student similarly stated a need for the school to hire a more diverse faculty (Anonymous 2013).

In discussion with the students, we found that almost all of them identify as Mexican, even if they were born here in the United States. We discussed their friend groups and activities in school, and while they all claimed to personally know all of the other Latinos, they stated that they have friends from their activities and classes who are not Latino. They also informed us that while their Latino identity is important to them, it is not a part of their everyday life at school. It is interesting to us that they desire more attention to culture and tradition in school, but they seem to have adapted to other traditions and practices because of what they are involved in at school. For example, three of the boys in our discussion play on the St. Joe’s football team and claim that this activity is more reflective of their high school identity than is their Latino heritage. Students may be more confident about their identity if they are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities and ultimately find a comfortable place in their school community. The most difficult part is encouraging students initially to involve themselves in these various opportunities because there could be initial discomfort, but ultimately it could benefit them greatly if they can be convinced to participate, based on the experiences of some of their peers.

## Recommendations by Experts

The writers of the *Latinos in North Central Indiana* brief provided recommendations for schools to create a supportive environment for their students in *Educational Challenges and Opportunities*. Their recommendations include the following:

- Create a culturally responsive school environment.
- Develop culturally responsive guidance practices.
- Increase the enrollment of Latino students in advanced classes and programs.
- Use the school as a community-building institution to increase parental engagement.
- Create opportunities for the development of social networks for Latino parents.
- Provide more sources of information and support for the college preparation and application process.
- Increase research, program development, and policy initiatives that address the experiences of specific sub-groups within the Latino population.

In general, these ideas are meant to improve Latino relations in schools. They are to help integrate Latinos into schools in the areas where they currently do not feel welcomed, and overall, to give Latinos an extra push in areas that may seem confusing to them due to natural linguistic or cultural barriers (Guzman and Reyes 2011:41-4).

The Alliance for Catholic Education at the University of Notre Dame is also working to improve education for Latinos in the United States. They believe that the Catholic school system is the solution, as mentioned earlier in this brief with our discussion of their plan titled the “Catholic School Advantage.” They believe that the wholesome and faith based education students receive in Catholic schools is more beneficial to students in later achievement. They also believe in starting students early, by making college a goal in the minds of students as early as kindergarten (“The Notre Dame Education Task Force”). It has been proven that a strong work ethic will make all the difference in the transition to college, and anything that can help foster this attitude is important in improving the success of Latino students (Martinez-Ramos, Pino, and Smith 2012:19).

This is a solution that already has its roots in St.

Joe’s and Marian and will continue with further support and recruitment for these schools. It is not just the existence of these schools, however, that will provide Latinos with a better educational experience. Awareness within schools equally important. Professor Marisel Moreno at the University of Notre Dame believes that literature and media are major influences for students. She believes that schools can become more culturally aware through making the right resources available. By only using textbooks and novels featuring the white majority, teachers send a negative message to minority students: “It tells you, you don’t matter, you don’t exist, you are not part of the greater narrative of the nation,” she claims (Moreno 2013).

Moreno also believes that Latino stereotypes in the media have incredibly negative influences on youth and that the overwhelming abundance of Latinos in negative lights rob Latino children “of the opportunity to have people believe in them, to sense that there are expectations they must meet, and that they are capable of doing so.” Her solution to fighting these stereotypes is by countering them, and “teaching [students] that there’s beauty in difference, and pride in their cultural roots.” Professor Moreno claims that by ignoring the problem, it will never be resolved. The results can start here in South Bend, because “there is so much that can be done and so much that should be done.” Ever optimistic, Moreno’s simple belief, “One kid at a time is all it takes,” is a thought to keep in mind while moving forward with awareness programs in South Bend (Moreno 2013). Progress, however small, is still progress.



## Our Recommendations

The importance of college has been drilled into the minds of these students, most likely from both their schools and their parents. These students' parents care a lot about their education and want them to succeed, even if they did not reach college themselves. They are making sacrifices to send their children to these expensive schools. Thus, these students understand that they must go to college in order to succeed.

We believe that perhaps the problem in students' achievement lies somewhere between the desire to achieve and the actual achievement. Students know what they need to do in the general sense (attend college), and genuinely want to go to college, but many fall short due to preparation issues. The blame could be placed in many areas, which is why this issue is so complex. Is it the school administration's fault? The parents'? The teachers'? The counselors'? Do the students that underachieve have the wrong friends? Are they simply misinformed? What does their Latino identity have to do with their underachievement? These are the questions that have been asked for decades, and it would be unrealistic to assume one specific community could answer them.

Nevertheless, we do have a few suggestions to offer for our community in South Bend. While experts have excellent intentions in promoting the success of Latino students in Catholic high schools in Saint Joseph County, more specific ideas need to be proposed in order to truly benefit this population. It has already been proven that cultural interactions, parental knowledge and involvement, and interaction with students are important, but *how* will these goals be achieved? Catholic high schools are already well respected and simply need to refine their ways.

There is no easy solution to this problem. Every student is different, every situation is different, and ultimately, no one solution will help each and every case. This is the fact that researchers have had to face again and again in the trials and errors of improving our education system.

Education at its core has its own concerns, its own problems to face and solve. These issues are not specific to Latino students. Rather than focusing on changes that may help within schools nationwide, we prefer to focus on solutions that may help within the community of St. Joseph County. While a few programs are already available to help students improve their achievement, we feel that they need a bit of refinement to cater more specifically to students' current needs.

For example, great after school programs are

available for students, but we feel that they generally fall into two categories: either slightly unreliable, or too strict in enrollment and involvement. We recommend that an alternative program be made available, one that involves both students and parents and allows students flexible interaction but also requires attendance at specific events. We want to stress that this would be a flexible program, with bilingual capabilities to also assist parents. A balance of individual attention and group discussion would also be beneficial.

We also believe that students often get lost or overwhelmed with too much information or too many contacts. If all of this information could be streamlined into one resource that also understands Latino culture, heritage, and common barriers to college, students may be more comfortable in these areas. It may be helpful for this resource to be one specific person assigned to the community who could act as a bridge between the home, the church, and the school.

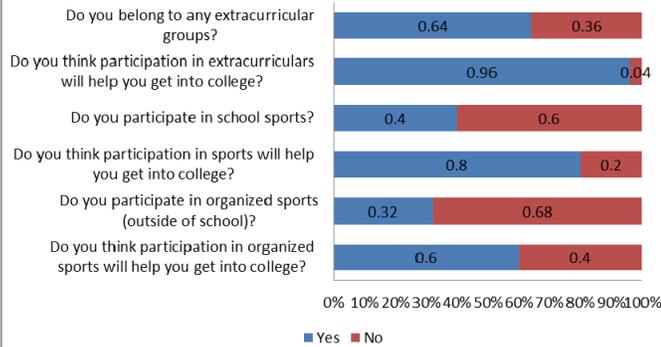
We would also like to stress that these programs are most beneficial if they begin working with students early in their academic careers, hopefully involving full interaction by the end of middle school. Students need to be made aware of possibilities early so that they can plan ahead. However, opportunities to be involved in such programs should not be unavailable to students who realize this need later on. It would simply be better to get them started as early as possible.

As for culture in schools, it is clear that there needs to be more cultural involvement. However, finding a way to absorb this without making students uncomfortable or creating resistance is difficult. Perhaps there simply has to be more exposure, more push for students to take charge themselves, and more encouragement for them to plan events that share their backgrounds with others. Perhaps this would best be accomplished through more a more cultural focus on all cultures and heritages for all students at St. Joe's and Marian.

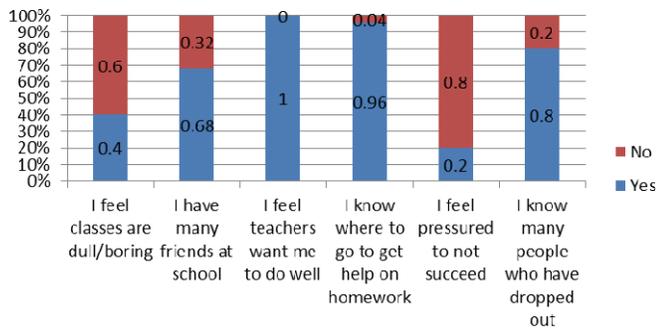


# Additional Data

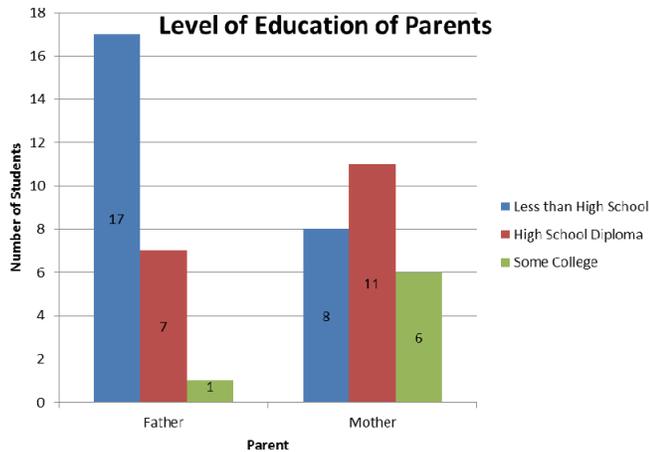
## Extracurricular Activities



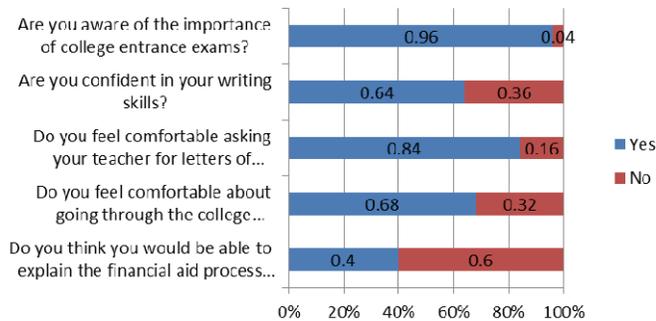
## Student Opinions on School



## Level of Education of Parents



## Student Preparation for College



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### Captions and Credits

- (1) Bird's eye view of St. Adalbert Parish <<http://i210.photobucket.com/albums/bb296/BnaBreaker/SouthBendStAdalbert.jpg>>
- (2) CCSS Logo <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/files/2013/04/common-core1.png>>
- (3) Students at a Notre Dame ACE Academy <[http://ace.nd.edu/images/ACE-NDAA/frontpage/IMG\\_6896.JPG](http://ace.nd.edu/images/ACE-NDAA/frontpage/IMG_6896.JPG)>
- (4) Promotion for the Catholic School Advantage <<http://ace.nd.edu/images/ACE-CSA/frontpage/csafrontpagebackground.jpg>>
- (5) Marian High School in Mishawaka, IN <<http://www.todaycatholicnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Marian-High-School-103-377x253.jpg>>
- (6) MEChA members with La Casa's Adelante students < Personal Picture: Amanda Varela >
- (7) TRiO's Upward Bound Logo <<http://trio.nd.edu/assets/79245/original/trio1.jpg>>
- (8) Importance of Language as gathered by the Pew Hispanic <[http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/05/PRC\\_12.05.29\\_Hispanic\\_Identity61-600x367.png](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/05/PRC_12.05.29_Hispanic_Identity61-600x367.png)>
- (9) Map of St. Joseph County, IN <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/06/St.\\_Joseph\\_County\\_Indiana\\_Incorporated\\_and\\_Unincorporated\\_areas\\_South\\_Bend\\_Highlighted.svg/250px-St.\\_Joseph\\_County\\_Indiana\\_Incorporated\\_and\\_Unincorporated\\_areas\\_South\\_Bend\\_Highlighted.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/06/St._Joseph_County_Indiana_Incorporated_and_Unincorporated_areas_South_Bend_Highlighted.svg/250px-St._Joseph_County_Indiana_Incorporated_and_Unincorporated_areas_South_Bend_Highlighted.svg.png)>
- (10) Findings from our Survey Regarding Spanish Language Proficiency
- (11) Findings from our Survey Regarding Language Use of Students at Home
- (12) Student's College Expectations
- (13) Notions about the Need of a College Education
- (14) Findings from our Survey Regarding on Parental Involvement
- (15) Findings from our Survey Regarding about Student Priorities
- (16) Student Views on Culture as gathered by our Survey
- (17) Students at a Notre Dame ACE Academy <<http://www.cathfind.org/image/ndaa/Thankyou-reduced.jpg>>
- (18) St. Joe's High School in South Bend, IN <[http://www.saintjoehigh.com/rotating\\_images/1610/1610\\_31\\_655\\_0\\_67.jpg](http://www.saintjoehigh.com/rotating_images/1610/1610_31_655_0_67.jpg)>
- (19) Findings from our Survey about Extracurricular Activities
- (20) Student Opinions about School
- (21) Level of Education of Parents
- (22) Student Preparation for College



# UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Brief Produced By:

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Enrique Lorenzo

Professor Karen Richman

Mexican Immigration: A South Bend Case Study

ILS 45103 Fall 2013

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