

Minding/Mending the Puerto Rican Education Pipeline in New York City

LUIS O. REYES

ABSTRACT

New York City has been the gateway city in the United States for the Puerto Rican migration as well as the locus for a significant proportion of the Puerto Rican student population. They continue to experience chronic underachievement as reflected in what has been characterized as a “leaky education pipeline.”

Puerto Rican youth face numerous social and economic barriers and have been concentrated in high schools where students have less than a 50/50 chance of graduating on time. These schools also spent less-per-pupil, were more segregated, and more overcrowded when compared with their affluent, white majority suburban counterparts. Now, many of these so-called “dropout factories” in Puerto Rican/Latino neighborhoods are being subjected to closing, restructuring or phasing out. Despite these realities, there is a dearth of publicly available, Puerto Rican-specific student data at all junctures in the education pipeline. This paper discusses what we know about the “leaky pipeline” absent such data and analyzes the possible policy and programmatic solutions in light of the larger “education reform” climate in New York and in the U.S. as a whole. [Keywords: Puerto Rican, educational pipeline, minding and mending, disparities, New York City]

The author (luisoreyes@aol.com) is a Research Associate and Director of Education Programs at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY. He has taught at Lehman, Hunter, Brooklyn, and Baruch Colleges, CUNY. His published work on bilingual policy and Latino educational activism has appeared in the *Harvard Educational Review*, the *Journal of Latinos and Education* and the *Bilingual Research Journal* (2002). He was Director of Research and Advocacy at Aspira of New York..

NEW YORK CITY, THE GATEWAY IN THE CONTINENTAL U.S. FOR THE PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION, HAS BEEN THE LOCUS FOR A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE PUERTO RICAN “EDUCATION PIPELINE.” De Jesús and Vasquez (2005) defined the larger Latino education pipeline in New York State as “the distribution of Latinos enrolled in pre-school through graduate and professional school... as well as the education attainment levels of the adult population over 25 years of age.” According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012), Latinos made up 19.2 percent of the total population and 21 percent of the K-12 population in New York State in the 2009–2010 school year.

As of 2010, Puerto Ricans remained the largest national sub-group among all Latinos in New York State at 31.6 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011) and 30.8 percent of the total Latino population of New York City that same year (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). However, Puerto Ricans only made up 26 percent of Latino youth (ages 16 through 24) in New York City with Dominican youth having eclipsed them in numbers at 29 percent (Treschan 2010).

Whatever their evolving status in the demographics of New York City, Puerto Ricans continue to face numerous social and economic barriers along with poor academic achievement, high dropout rates and low college enrollment and graduation rates. This report seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How well or poorly are Puerto Ricans, in particular, youth between 16 and 24 years of age, faring academically in New York City?
2. How are Puerto Rican males faring among the youth population compared to Puerto Rican females and male youth from other Latino subgroups in New York City?
3. What would “minding” or “mending” the problem of chronic underachievement and limited educational attainment of Puerto Rican students in New York City involve besides enumerating statistics?

We bring attention to this Latino subgroup’s educational status at a time when regular, public reporting at the city, state, and federal levels is mostly limited to documenting enrollment and educational attainment levels at the aggregate “Hispanic” or “Latino” level. This report uses federal census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2011) as well as data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (US DOE-NCES 2011). It also looks at student enrollment and

educational attainment data publicly available from the New York City Department of Education (New York City Department of Education 2009), The City University of New York (CUNY Office of Policy Research 2011), and the New York State Education Department (2010). While disaggregated Latino student data are collected by city and state agencies and reported to the federal government, they are not presented formally and annually to either elected officials and/or appointed bodies of city and state government or to the public, including the parents of public school students.

More recent data indicate that among New York City Latinos, Puerto Ricans have the highest rates of poverty, with 33.4 percent of their households living below the federal poverty level.

The Socioeconomic Profile of Puerto Ricans in New York City

The New York City Department of City Planning (2011) reports that the city's population was 8,175,133 persons as of April 1, 2010 with the Hispanic population reaching 2,336,076, accounting for 28.6 percent of the city's population. Table 1 indicates the presence of 723,069 Puerto Ricans who remained the largest national sub-group among all Latinos in the city in 2010 at 30.8 percent of the total Latino population and 8.9 percent of the city's total population (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

TABLE 1. SELECTED POPULATION PROFILE IN THE UNITED STATES 2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 1-YEAR ESTIMATES; NEW YORK CITY, NY

Subject	Hispanic or Latino (of any race) (200–299)	Puerto Rican (260–269)	Dominican (275–279)	Mexican (210–220)
TOTAL NUMBER OF RACES REPORTED				
Total population	2,346,826	723,069	620,394	319,458
Percent of Latino Population	100.0 percent	30.8 percent	26.4 percent	13.6 percent

In 2002, there were over 200,000 disconnected young adults in New York City, between the ages of 16 and 24 years, living in poverty, lacking family supports, and not connected to school or work. A large proportion of them were Latino young adults (New York City Commission for Economic Opportunity 2006). The Commission did

not provide disaggregated data for Puerto Rican youth. However, it reported that the overall “...poverty rate for African Americans and Hispanics is higher than the city average—21.4 percent for African Americans and 28.6 percent for Hispanics” (2006: 8). More recent data indicate that among New York City Latinos, Puerto Ricans have the highest rates of poverty, with 33.4 percent of their households living below the federal poverty level (Treschan 2010: 11).

Shortcomings of the New York City Public School System

City public schools have a long history of failure when it comes to Puerto Rican students completing school with a high school diploma. Starting with the Assistant Superintendent’s Report of 1948 (Association of Assistant Superintendents 1948), episodic studies and reports by the public school system such as *The Puerto Rican Study, 1954–57* (Morrison 1958), focused on the failure of Puerto Rican students to achieve academically and to graduate from high school. Although government studies highlighted student and parent characteristics, Puerto Rican and other researchers (Fitzpatrick 1971) as well as community leaders rejected analyses that framed the question as “the Puerto Rican problem” (Sánchez-Korrol 1983; Reyes 2000). The latter have argued that school characteristics were more salient, challenging school and elected officials “to adapt to Puerto Rican students’ needs and to reform structural arrangements, organizational culture, and funding policies” (Reyes 2000: 81).

This early history of failure in the 1950s led Dr. Antonia Pantoja and other Puerto Rican educators and community leaders to found ASPIRA, Inc. in 1961 (later incorporated as ASPIRA of New York, Inc.) to foster the social and educational advancement of Puerto Rican students. It also led ASPIRA of New York in 1983 to produce a report (Calitri 1983) that documented that up to 68 percent of Latino students were dropping out of City schools. Instead of being a successful pathway out of poverty, as it has been for some Puerto Rican and other Latino students over the years, too many city public high schools fit the definition of “dropout factories,” schools where less than 60 percent of entering freshmen were still enrolled four years later (Balfanz and Legters 2004).

In New York City, many Latino students—who are frequently also poor – attend segregated public schools (Fessenden 2012). Orfield, Siegel-Hawley and Kucsera (2012), documenting deepening school segregation at the state level, report that while Latino students made up 21.5 percent of students enrolled in New York State public schools in 2009–2010, 83.9 percent of them were enrolled in 50–100 percent minority schools and 56.7 percent were enrolled in 90–100 percent minority schools. For the latter statistic, New York ranked first in the nation; and ranked third in terms of Latino students (20 percent) attending public schools where 0 to 1 percent of students were white.

In New York City, segregated and low-performing middle schools serve student bodies that are almost 100 percent African American and Latino—45.7 percent and 51.6 percent, respectively—(New York City Coalition for Educational Justice 2007). These same middle schools with high concentrations of low-income, African American and Latino students (80 percent), were found to have the least experienced teachers, the most teachers teaching out of certification, and the highest rates of teacher turnover (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice 2007).

One urgent area that needs “minding” but has not received much attention from most policymakers nor researchers is the issue of the diminishing numbers of Black and Latino teachers (not to mention Puerto Rican teachers, in particular) in New York City schools as the City’s Latino and Black student population grows. Anderson (2006) reported on the sixteen-year record of the racial/ethnic breakdown of new hires by the New York City public school system between 1990 and 2006. According to Anderson, Latino “new hires” peaked at 18.4 percent in 1994–95 and made up only 11.7 percent of “new hires” in 2006–07. Black “new hires” peaked at 27.2 percent in 2001–02 at the beginning of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration and decreased to 14.1 percent in 2006–07. White “new hires” over this period increased from 58.4 percent to 65.5 percent while the population of students of color (Black, Latino and Asian) in city schools grew to 85 percent. Many Latino and Black teachers are concentrated in over-crowded, under-resourced and low-performing schools with high concentrations of the very same low-income students of color (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice 2007).

These so-called “dropout factories” have been the subject of attention over the last eight years of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration, with many large high schools in Puerto Rican/Latino neighborhoods subjected to closing, restructuring, or phasing out.

Balfanz and Letgers (2004) found that 68 percent of high schools in New York City in 2002 had “weak promoting power”—that is, “students have less than a 50/50 chance of graduating on time, if at all.” These were majority minority high schools (many of them with concentrations of Puerto Rican and other Latino high school students). These low-performing high schools also spent less-per-pupil, were more segregated, and more overcrowded when compared with their affluent, white majority suburban counterparts. These schools are the ones most impacted by the shortage of math, science, special education, and bilingual/ESL teachers (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice 2007).

These so-called “dropout factories” have been the subject of attention over the last eight years of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration, with many large high schools in Puerto Rican/Latino neighborhoods subjected to closing, restructuring, or phasing out (see Table 2). Among the high schools, both small and large, to be closed as of 2011 were Norman Thomas H.S. in mid-town Manhattan (70 percent Latino enrollment) and the Academy of Environmental Science Secondary School in East Harlem (65 percent Latino). Large high schools being phased out in the Bronx included John F. Kennedy H.S. (64 percent Latino), Christopher Columbus H.S. (49 percent Latino), and the smaller Global Enterprise H.S. (55 percent Latino).

TABLE 2. SELECTED NEW YORK CITY HIGH SCHOOLS TO BE PHASED OUT, STARTING IN FALL 2011

MANHATTAN	Norman Thomas High School	70 percent Latino, 19 percent ELL
	Academy of Environmental Science Secondary HS	65 percent Latino, 10 percent ELL
BRONX	John F. Kennedy High School	64 percent Latino, 28 percent ELL
	Christopher Columbus High School	49 percent Latino, 20 percent ELL
	Global Enterprise High School	55 percent Latino, 17 percent ELL
QUEENS	Beach Channel High School	34 percent Latino, 7 percent ELL
	Jamaica High School	18 percent Latino, 17 percent ELL

Source: http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/education/2010/01/27/2010-01-27_dont_shut_19_schools_angry_parents_tell_city.html#ixzz1DDbkvo1L/.

The Educational Profile of Puerto Rican Youth in New York City

The Community Service Society of New York’s recently released policy brief, titled *New York City’s Future Looks Latino: Latino Youth in New York City* (Treschan 2010), brought renewed attention to Puerto Rican youth. The CSS report uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS), an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau; however, in this case, a merged sample from 2006, 2007, and 2008 was the source of information. The *New York Times* coverage of the report (Dolnick 2010) highlighted “the plight of Puerto Rican youth” and noted that the ACS data showed them to be “the most disadvantaged of all ethnic groups in New York City.” Among the findings: 24 percent of young Puerto Rican males (16–24) were disconnected both from school and work; only 55 percent of U.S.-born Puerto Rican youth were enrolled in school; and 33 percent of all Puerto Rican families lived below the poverty line.

These alarming findings led CSS and the Hispanic Federation, an umbrella organization of almost 100 non-profits, to form a task force to respond. At the same time Puerto Rican community leaders, elected officials, and youth formed a coalition and called for government funding for grassroots organizations working with Puerto Rican youth. Experts pointed to various explanations for the “Puerto Rican plight,” including longstanding discrimination, neglect from government agencies, the flight of successful Puerto Ricans to the suburbs, the impact of concentrated poverty, and the loss of “entrepreneurial motivation that is common among new arrivals” (Dolnick 2010).

Many Puerto Rican youth continue to share existential conditions and educational outcomes with African-American youth, especially male youth.

Many Puerto Rican youth continue to share existential conditions and educational outcomes with African-American youth, especially male youth. Only 55 percent of native-born Puerto Rican youth (ages 16 through 24) attend school in New York City (Treschan 2010: 7), a rate that is closer to native-born Black youth (61 percent) than to native-born Dominicans (68 percent) and native-born Mexicans (67 percent). However, over 33 percent of Puerto Rican youth live in poor households compared to 23 percent of non-Hispanic black youth (Treschan 2010: 11). While just over 29 percent of native-born, black youth have not attained a high school or equivalent diploma, 41 percent of Puerto Rican young males and 32 percent of young females are without a high school or GED diploma (Treschan 2010: 8–9). Along with other Latino youth, Puerto Ricans have the highest dropout rates in the U.S. and low college enrollment and graduation rates. According to the American Community Survey, 2007, 18 percent of Puerto Ricans earned a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 19.7 percent of Blacks and 48 percent of Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Among adults 25 years of age and older, 16.7 percent of Puerto Ricans in New York City in 2007 attained less than 9th-grade status—compared to 9 percent of Blacks and 6 percent of Whites (Treschan October 2010). Similarly, 21.4 percent of Puerto Ricans attained less than a high school diploma (compared to 12 percent of Blacks and only 6 percent of Whites).

Minding and Mending the Puerto Rican Education Pipeline: K-12 Education

One of the other challenges for the Puerto Rican community in New York City and beyond is the fact that neither local public school systems nor state and federal government regularly disaggregate data on Puerto Rican students in their public

reports on student enrollment, standardized test scores, or high school dropout and graduation rates. Puerto Ricans are subsumed under the more generalized “Hispanic” or “Latino” ethnic category, including annual reports on the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). One notable exception are the annual reports on SAT scores published by the College Board. Researchers, policymakers, and community leaders interested in learning what the status is from year to year of school enrollment and educational attainment of Puerto Rican students, whether in New York City, New York State, other states, or the nation as a whole, have to rely on the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, which sample the general population (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau 2011) and disaggregate Hispanic data.

In fact, it was CSS, a non-profit organization in New York City, that used data from the ACS, in this case, a merged sample from 2006, 2007, and 2008, to report on the high number of Puerto Rican youth, especially males, living in poverty, not attending school, and disconnected from the world of work.

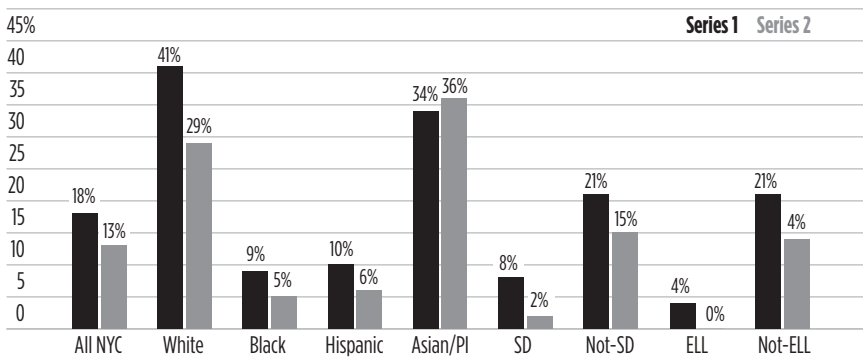
This generalized lack of public attention (“minding”) to the educational status of Puerto Rican students is so despite the long history of educational advocacy by Puerto Rican community leaders and organizations, such as *Aspira* of New York and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. These organizations historically critiqued the City’s public schools system for its failure to educate Puerto Rican children and youth. The many policy reports and legal challenges such as the 1972 federal lawsuit, *Aspira v. Board of Education*, have given way to a period of focus on Latinos, in general, and on immigrant students. In New York City, Dominican, Mexican, and other immigrant Latinos are today more likely than Puerto Ricans to be eligible as English language learners (ELLs) to receive bilingual or ESL instruction.

In fact, it was CSS, a non-profit organization in New York City, that used data from the ACS, in this case, a merged sample from 2006, 2007, and 2008, to report on the high number of Puerto Rican youth, especially males, living in poverty, not attending school, and disconnected from the world of work. On the other hand, the Schott Foundation for Public Education, a national policy and advocacy entity focusing on Black educational disparities, did not report disaggregated data for Puerto Rican students in their 2009 report that calculated an “Opportunity to Learn Index Score.” Opportunity to learn is defined as access to high quality early

childhood education, to highly effective teachers, to well-funded instructional materials, and to a college preparatory curriculum. The Foundation reported that New York's Black, Latino, and Native American students, taken together, have a quarter of the opportunity to learn in the state's best-supported, best-performing schools than the state's White, non-Latino students. This opportunity-to-learn gap is reflected, they report, by the fact that 66 percent of Latinos and 64 percent of Black students in New York State attend poorly resourced and low-performing schools, contrasted with 12 percent of White students.

Another example of inattention to state-side Puerto Rican students' achievement is the most recent national report on achievement in science among 4th- and 8th-grade students, part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). NAEP indicates that 9 percent of Black 4th graders and 10 percent of Latino 4th graders in New York City scored at or above proficiency on the NAEP science exam compared to 41 percent of White 4th graders. The science proficiency proportions on the 8th-grade test were 5 percent, 6 percent, and 29 percent for the three respective groups. NAEP science scores were not reported for Puerto Rican students in New York. In effect, White, non-Latino 4th graders are four times as likely as Latino 4th graders to be proficient in science as measured on the NAEP science test; and, White, non-Latino 8th graders are almost 5 times as likely as Latino 8th graders to be proficient on the 8th-grade NAEP science test.

FIGURE 1. ACHIEVEMENT-LEVEL IN NAEP SCIENCE FOR 4TH AND 8TH GRADE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS, NYC 2009 (PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY)



Source: Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education (2011)

Another example of the simultaneous salience and absence of data on Puerto Rican students in New York City is the case study of the achievement levels of Latino males in public middle and high schools in various New York City neighborhoods (Meade and Gaytan 2009). No data were reported specifically on Puerto Rican male students. Five community school districts (CSDs) were identified as the lowest performing: CSD 4 in East Harlem, CSD 8 in the Bronx, CSD 7 in the South Bronx, CSD 23 in Brownsville and East New York, Brooklyn, and CSD 30 in Queens. The first four districts include neighborhoods with large numbers of Puerto Rican households. Less than 22 percent of African-American and Latino students in four of the districts graduated with a Regents diploma in four years. In three districts, one-third of the selected students completed less than five credits in their freshman year of high school. These areas were also found to have severe levels of neighborhood poverty. In low-performing districts, low academic performance and high dropout rates can be traced to deficiencies existing from middle schools with high concentrations of low-income students. While, in general, these students have extensive needs, many teachers in these low-performing schools are inexperienced, without their master's degree, and in need of instructional support and professional development (Meade and Gaytan 2009). The effect of these conditions on Puerto Rican male students are not clearly known or understood in the absence of disaggregated data.

Other critical findings of relevance for policymakers studying the “Puerto Rican educational pipeline” are that 91.4 percent of U.S.-born Puerto Rican youth (and 85 percent of Latino youth) report speaking English well or very well (Treschan, October 2010). Most suggest, as a result, that English Language Learner (ELL) programming should not be the predominant policy concern for Latino youth. The relevance of bilingual or ESL program models of instruction for the academic achievement of Puerto Rican students in New York is not known, given the absence of disaggregated Puerto Rican student data, not to mention the continuing decrease in the number of available bilingual programs for ELL students in general (New York City Department of Education 2009b).

At the same time, the New York State Education Department released a report (Otterman 2011) that shows that only 23 percent of City general education students who graduated in June 2010 were “college and career ready,” that is, earned both 80 points or better on their math Regents exam and 75 or better on their English Regents exam. Only 13.3 percent of Latino general education students in the City met this graduation standard. The Board of Regents is considering using the more rigorous “college and career ready” standard in the near future in order to align New York State with President Obama’s national education goal. There is no accurate count of the proportion of Puerto Rican students in New York City who met this more rigorous graduation standard.

Minding and Mending the Puerto Rican Education Pipeline:

Postsecondary Education

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2011) indicate severe disparities in undergraduate and graduate college attainment among 25 and older Puerto Ricans, Latinos, in general, and whites. Reyes and Meléndez (2012) report that Puerto Ricans in New York City have the greatest disparity in college attainment when compared to whites. While 24.7 percent of whites completed a bachelor's degree and 19.3 percent a graduate or professional degree, only 8.6 percent of Puerto Ricans completed a bachelor's degree and 3.9 percent a graduate or professional degree. Latinos show a similar disparity with 10.2 percent of the population with a bachelor's degree and 4.8 percent with a graduate or professional degree. Puerto Ricans also have substantial educational attainment disparities at the national and state levels, though less pronounced than those for New York City. At the national level, 10.8 percent of Puerto Ricans have completed a bachelor's degree, and 5.4 percent a graduate or professional degree, while whites' rates are 18.6 percent and 10.9 percent, respectively.

Reyes and Meléndez (2012) further report that these disparities are more pronounced for Puerto Rican men than for women. In New York City, 75 percent of white men have completed or are enrolled in college or graduate school, while only 25 percent of Puerto Rican men have similar attainment. At the New York state level, 64 percent of white men have completed or are enrolled in college or graduate school, while only 28 percent of Puerto Rican men have similar attainment. In New York City, 83 percent of white women have completed or are enrolled in college or graduate school, while only 40 percent of Puerto Rican women have similar attainment. At the New York state level, 70 percent of white women have completed or are enrolled in college or graduate school, while only 41 percent of Puerto Rican women have similar attainment.

Presently, 75 percent of City public school graduates who enroll in the City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges need to take remedial math or English courses before they are able to do college-level work (Otterman 2011). This is so at the same time that the City's Department of Education (DOE) reported an increase in the number of City high school graduates between 2002 and 2008 enrolling in CUNY four-year senior and two-year community colleges (NYCDOE, March 18, 2009). Latino graduates' enrollment in CUNY community colleges rose by 100 percent over this period, compared to 70 percent for public schools students overall. Since 2002, Latinos increased their enrollment at CUNY's four-year colleges by 53 percent, compared to a 37 percent enrollment increase overall. However, Leinbach and Bailey (2006) report that as early as 2000, Dominican students, both native-born and foreign-born, were

over-represented at CUNY, given their presence in the city-wide population, while Puerto Ricans were strongly under-represented, both native and foreign born.

The CUNY Office of Policy Research (2011) reported that Dominicans made up the majority of foreign-born Latinos enrolled in CUNY in Fall 2010; Puerto Ricans' proportion of Latino enrollment "declined steadily" from 28 percent in 1999 to 11 percent in 2010. Falcón (2012, August 14), extrapolating from published CUNY data, calculated that Dominicans made up 45 percent of CUNY Latino enrollment in Fall 2010.

Like the situation in the K-12 public school system, there is a dearth of annual and publicly available data disaggregating CUNY Latino enrollment, retention, and graduation data, both overall, by campus or by level. This is an overall reality, at both the city and state level, that makes it difficult both to "mind" and to "mend" the Puerto Rican education pipeline in New York City. Last year, however, The Education Trust published a data brief (Lynch and Engle 2010) about institutions with small and large gaps in college graduation rates between Latino and white students. The authors found that at CUNY's Brooklyn College, the six-year success rate for Latino students between 2006 and 2008 was 33.5 percent, compared with a 53 percent graduation rate for white students, resulting in an almost 20-point gap. One can only speculate on the 6-year graduation rate of Puerto Rican students at Brooklyn College, one of the earliest CUNY senior colleges to enroll Puerto Rican students. Clearly, data on Puerto Rican and other Latino subgroup student enrollments, progress, and graduation within CUNY as a whole and at each of the 2-year and 4-year colleges would assist policymakers, administrators, and researchers in "minding" and "mending" the education pipeline.

Strategies for Change: Latino Parent Involvement, Engagement, and Empowerment

Puerto Rican/Latino families and children have the highest poverty rate in New York City. Given the correlation between poverty and low educational attainment, it is imperative to reduce poverty among Puerto Rican/Latino young children, young adults and the working poor. At the same time, school leaders must engage parents in culturally competent ways by providing information, skills-building, and meaningful leadership training. In turn, parents and community must become empowered to participate in school governance, to monitor the school system, and to advocate for education reform. There are a number of actions recommended to promote and implement Latino parent involvement, engagement, and empowerment.

1. Increase the income capability of Latino working adults by developing and expanding culturally competent workforce development services that help adult English language learners to improve their skills and ultimately obtain employment (Hispanic Federation 2006).

2. Recognize the importance of finding new ways to connect with the diverse Puerto Rican/Latino parent communities in New York, including U.S.-born and immigrant parents. Provide information in parents' primary language—whether English or Spanish—on the school's academic and developmental goals, on student achievement, with particular attention to information that relates directly to their child or children.

3. Ensure that all school documents distributed to parents are translated professionally and that simultaneous English-Spanish interpretation is available at regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, PA meetings, and other public meetings in the school and community district.

4. Help newly arrived parents gain *cultural capital*, the skills to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the norms of behavior that govern schools in New York. Enable them to feel competent to negotiate the system on behalf of their child or knowledgeable enough to support their child's efforts by talking with them directly rather than using only more formal written communications, such as letters and notes (Bazron, Osher and Fleischman 2005).

5. Educate parents and guardians about parent rights, advocacy, and how to prepare their child for a college curriculum in high school. Provide parents instruction and modeling on how to reduce their child's inappropriate behavior and promote desirable behavior. Hold parent leadership seminars—in English and Spanish—to empower Latino parents to become leaders in their own families, schools, and communities (Sobel and Kugler 2007).

6. Provide bilingual training to enable Latino parents, including Spanish-dominant immigrant parents, to gain positions as officers in the Parents Association, as members of the School Leadership Team (SLT), and as members of the local District's Presidents Council and Community Education Council.

7. Open a comprehensive parent welcome or resource center, coordinated by a community-based organization within the schools or the community district that would provide materials in Spanish and English about the school, information about community services, and access to the Internet.

8. Develop meaningful partnerships with Puerto Rican/Latino/immigrant parents by training and guiding teachers in action research to increase their understanding of parents from different cultures and national origins (Sobel and Kugler 2007). Teacher researchers can conduct collaborative surveys and do personal interviews with parents and other community members.

9. Replicate and expand initiatives such as the Coalition for Educational Justice's neighborhood collaboratives that are dedicated to documenting educational problems and leading school improvement efforts. The Coalition recently published a report

on the crisis in middle-grade schools in New York City (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice 2007).

10. Replicate and adapt the work of the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) and Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., which have trained ELL/immigrant parents and advocates throughout the City to monitor parent and student access to school services. Together, they helped NYIC and AFC staff to do the research and monitoring that led to the recently published report on ELL students in the new small high schools (NYIC & AFC 2006).

What would “minding” or “mending” the problem of chronic underachievement and limited educational attainment of Puerto Rican students in New York City involve besides enumerating statistics and encouraging parent engagement?

Strategies for Change: Puerto Rican/Latino Researchers, Educators, and Policymakers

What would “minding” or “mending” the problem of chronic underachievement and limited educational attainment of Puerto Rican students in New York City involve besides enumerating statistics and encouraging parent engagement? Puerto Rican educators in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s supported Spanish-English bilingualism and biliteracy and developmental bilingual education for Puerto Rican/Latino students as “an affirmation of the importance of language and culture...for individual and collective identity...” (Pantoja and Perry 1993). Pioneers of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College in the 1970s, led by the late Dr. Frank Bonilla (National Puerto Rican Task Force on Educational Policy 1977) argued for the need to establish our own paradigms for analyzing and understanding the Puerto Rican experience:

“We propose that bilinguality should become a self-consciously articulated goal for our community in the U.S. By this we do not mean a community with a mix of English and Spanish speakers but a community in which as many as possible acquire competence in both languages. Implicit in this idea of bilinguality is the idea of mother tongue retention. That means not merely “maintenance” of Spanish for native speakers but the passing along of both languages to their offspring by bilinguals.”

Today, Puerto Rican/Latino educators and researchers argue that we need to contextualize the educational experience of Puerto Rican youth within the life

they live in a city that is ever more racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse and economically divided. They share many economic and educational conditions with other, more recently arrived Latino communities, including undocumented immigrants from Mexico, Central America and South America, who reflect the growing presence of Latinos in New York City and in the continental U.S. Puerto Rican and other Latino youth also share socioeconomic realities, school-based conditions and educational outcomes with African American youth, especially male youth (Meade et al. 2009).

Edwin Meléndez, the current director of Centro, has asserted (2008) that a Puerto Rican research agenda (“minding”) and a policy and programmatic response (“mending”) must “include a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective...;” foster “new pedagogies that celebrate and value our cultural and historical heritage, and use this knowledge to affect social change and public policy;” and strengthen and establish “partnerships with other Latino and African American research centers and academic programs” while being vigilant to maintain the intellectual integrity and relevance of Puerto Rican studies. Meléndez further argues that Centro and like-minded academic partners in Puerto Rican Studies departments can “mind” the educational pipeline by developing a shared intellectual agenda focused on the development of new forms of scholarship. We can also “mend” the pipeline by identifying curriculum gaps and exploring student-focused, service-learning pedagogies (Meléndez 2008) that support our public school students and their teachers (through Early College and Dual Enrollment programs) as well as the undergraduate and graduate students in our institutions of higher education.

Another set of recommendations for “mending” this educational pipeline focuses on the dropout crisis among Black and Latino male students in New York City (Meade and Gaytan 2009; Meade et al. 2009). Often these overage and under-credited youth enter high school having failed to pass eighth-grade standardized tests in English Language Arts and Math. They have repeated ninth grade, failed core subjects and thus not accumulated enough credits to stay on track for graduation. For Meade and Gaytan (2009), “mending” their pipeline involves enhancing and supporting students’ basic skills development, creating alternate pathways to graduation, and providing supportive transitions from middle and to high school. Also needed are teachers and staff who are culturally competent in terms of the community of their students and/or receive consistent support and mentoring in the classroom and professional development so they can provide better learning environments and opportunities for their students. The bottom line is providing equal and consistent access to quality education, translated as opportunity-to-learn standards like high quality pre-school experiences, smaller class sizes with effective teachers, rigorous curricula and

interactive, student-centered pedagogies (Noguera, Hurtado and Ferguson 2012).

Finally, the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project, or NLERAP, is a national network of educators, community activists, university scholars, and other Latino community stakeholders formed in 2000. In the last two years, NLERAP has mapped out a multi-year approach in response to the educational crisis confronting Latino communities across the United States, including Puerto Rican communities in New York City (Nieto, Rivera and Quiñones 2010). NLERAP is pursuing a national-level initiative termed the Teacher Education Institute (TEI) as part of a comprehensive approach to influence the educational experiences and outcomes for Latino/a youth and not just “mend” the Latino education pipeline, but build a pipeline for students into the teaching profession. The TEI initiative, like NLERAP itself, draws from a wealth of participatory and collaborative research and seeks to create and build on partnerships among community, public, and secondary and postsecondary education institutions. The overarching principle is that to address disparities in Latino/a students’ opportunities to learn, NLERAP must focus directly on our children’s teachers along with the needs of English language learners (ELLs), a sizable subpopulation among the different Latino communities.

The editors of the NLERAP report (Nieto, Rivera and Quiñones 2010) state in their executive summary:

Latino/a education is at a critical juncture, not only for Latino/a students but also for the nation as a whole. It is imperative that schools and communities affirm students’ home culture and ethnicity in a deliberative and strategic effort to build on students’ backgrounds and experiences toward academic achievement.

Surely the same can be said specifically for Puerto Rican students in New York City. One such student, Ricardo Gabriel, now a doctoral student in the Sociology program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY), may have put it best in his personal testimony at a public hearing of the New York City Council’s Committee on Higher Education (Gabriel 2011):

...it was the ethnic studies department and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College that sparked my passion for higher education. I transferred to Hunter after two years at a private university because I was so excited that there were these programs and institutions that actually spoke to and validated my—and my family’s—history and experiences as working-class Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the U.S. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies quickly became my “intellectual home” as I used

its resources for numerous academic projects, as well as for personal interest, and developed supportive relationships with librarians, researchers, and affiliated faculty. It gave me a point of reference and allowed me to develop a better understanding of the world. That grounding helped me develop the confidence to know that I did belong in academia and helped me excel in all of my classes.

...In order to retain underrepresented students at CUNY, or anywhere else in the country, it is extremely important to have culturally relevant coursework, faculty and advisors that relate to the students, and institutions like Centro, like the Dominican Studies Institute, like the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora that give students a sense of belonging.

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