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Equity through Education:

Adapting the US Education System to a 21st Century Student Body

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelors of Arts from Rockefeller College of Public Affairs
and Policy with Honors in Public Policy*

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Abstract

As policies surrounding immigration are in the forefront of our political discourse, this paper seeks to address the experience of Latino students in the US education system and the resulting impacts. After a thorough review of scholarly literature on the matter as well as data from the US Census Bureau and research institutions, this paper finds that Latino students are being left out of the US education system. Latino students across the country are dropping out of high school at rates greater than their white counterparts. This disparity in high school graduation rates has created a barrier in the education pipeline for Latino students.

This paper examines the negative feedback loop created with the factors of immigration patterns, educational attainment, and economic success. As Latinos are immigrating to the United States in large numbers every year, their population is projected to make up 31% of the population by the year 2050. However, in our schools, many Latino students, especially in areas with a high Latino population, are failing to attain high school degrees. Dropping out of high school has impacts at the individual, community, and societal level. Students find it more difficult to obtain gainful employment, communities are more likely to face criminal activity, and the entire society faces the challenge of increased poverty and the loss in contribution to the US economy. The point in which an intervention is most likely to stop this feedback loop is in the education system. Public schools have the opportunity to prevent a cultural and economic divide in this country by properly addressing the diversity of needs in the modern student body.

In an effort to present viable intervention options for state governments and local school districts, this paper reviews several intervention policies in the United States. Most policies geared toward increasing graduation rates among Latino students specifically address English Language Learners (ELL). This paper finds that many of these programs are unsuccessful as they may isolate ELL students from their peers and fail to address the language and cultural aspects of English as a second language. Moreover, some states have robust ELL education requirements, but not the will or capacity to ensure compliance. The ELL programs are also found to be indicative of other intervention programs. Successful programs are those at the community level that engage the students' culture and promote an appreciation of diversity—teaching all students in the one classroom both English and Spanish language and culture.

However, these great successes at the community level are not easily transferable to other communities. Furthermore, intervention attempts from the national level are found to be out of touch with the needs of the localities. This paper proposes a network-based approach to Latino education that provides communities the resources to share knowledge and transform their schools in a way that best suits that particular area. With the increase in attention to the Latino vote during each election cycle as well as the current immigration debate, the political will exists for discussion and legislation to stop the negative feedback loop and allow all students to have an equal opportunity to continue along the education pipeline.

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, the United States has experienced a significant increase in immigration from Latin America. This increase in immigration, combined with the prevalence of poor socioeconomic conditions among this population, has raised concern over the well-being and achievement of Latinos¹ in the US. In search of correlating factors contributing to this disadvantage, educational attainment is foremost among them. A significant proportion of Latino students experience an education “gap” beginning at the post-secondary level—demonstrated by data indicating that Latino students are less likely to graduate from high school and enter college than their white counterparts. This barrier to the “education pipeline” for Latino students (considered by some to be the education pathway from “cradle to career”) is causing the development of a negative feedback loop among immigration, education, and economic opportunity. With all the data and policy options available, this loop can be altered through innovative and inclusive education reform.

The negative feedback loop caused by educational disenfranchisement leads to a perpetuation of diminished opportunity. Such a detriment becomes a continuation of poverty, crime, underemployment, and underserved intra- and inter-cultural communities. Forecasts suggest that, without intervention, this cycle will have negative impacts on the overall economic achievement of the United States. With Latino immigration patterns predicted to peak by the mid-2020s, the diversity of the United States will continue to increase to what many have already referred to as a majority-minority country before 2050. This demographic change in our country is causing the education gap to widen and affect our country on an individual, community, and

¹ Latinos, Latino Americans, and Hispanics will be used interchangeably in this paper

societal level as Latino students drop out of school in significant numbers every year and face the challenge of obtaining gainful employment to better their communities.

In an effort to remedy this disparity, dropout prevention policies have been enacted with varying levels of success. Policies that relate to bilingual education, for example, at the national and state level have demonstrated an idealistic commitment to improving the academic environment for Latinos. While the commitment is present, the policies face a drastic disconnect with local schools; through inadequate funding, insufficient oversight, and a lack of engagement from the communities. At the local level, isolated communities have achieved high levels of success by integrating dual-language programs in primary schools as well as Hispanic culture classes in secondary school. However, many dropout interventions are segmented across communities. There is a lack of coordination and sharing of best practices—preventing the potential for widespread change. If these community-level programs developed cross-community education networks and received state and federal financial support, United States public education would transform into a dynamic system that serves students with varying needs.

Education is commonly considered to be the key to economic success. Therefore, if a certain population has an influx of immigration and a subsequent high-achieving economic status, it is not a stretch to identify opportunity through education as one, if not the primary, link that allowed for such success. Conversely, as in the case of Latino immigrants, a lack of educational attainment has proven to prevent the large population of immigrants from reaching a middle class or higher socioeconomic status. As the Latino population in the United States continues to grow, the economic disadvantage will perpetuate due to educational failure. Furthermore, as political pressures rise through the Latino voting power, reform will become a

political necessity. By bridging the education gap, immigrants from Latin America will be more likely to achieve economic success and contribute to the overall economy of the country.

Latinos in the United States: Immigration Patterns

The well-being of the Latino population is of immediate national concern for the reason that the Latino population is a significant proportion of the United States. An increase in Latino immigration indicates an increase in overall immigration to the United States—as the immigrant population in the United States has increased by 30% since 2000 (Pew Hispanic Center). In 2012, Hispanics composed 17% of the total United States population (US Census Bureau). Over half (53%) of all immigrants in the United States are from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Pew Hispanic Center). As detailed later in this paper, individuals immigrating to the United States are settling down in states that are politically and economically dominant in the country. Forty-six percent of all immigrants (Latino and non-Latino) in the United States live in one of three states: California (25%), New York (11%), and Texas (10%) (Pew Hispanic Center). Not surprisingly, these states also have the three largest economies in the country (California, Texas, and New York, respectively). This increase in immigration and correlation to large states demonstrates the immense opportunity for this population to positively contribute to the economy, provided certain circumstances and resources.

While examining the Latino population in the United States, it is essential to examine population projections to predict the societal impact on public policy issues here discussed. In the case of Latino immigration, the Census Bureau as well as other government agencies and nongovernmental organizations have developed models based on complex interactions that lead to immigration from certain regions as well as patterns indicating the growth of the population

currently residing in the United States. All of these dynamic models come to similar conclusions—that the Hispanic population will increase while the non-Hispanic White population will soon begin to decrease. In 2060, the Census Bureau predicts (based in large part on data from the 2010 census), that one in three United States residents will be Hispanic, compared to one in six today (US Census Bureau). This increase, from 17% of the population to 31% of the population, will have significant educational consequences—even greater than what we have seen over the last ten years. At stake if this trend is realized is a massively disproportionate disadvantage for the integration and achievement of the Latino demographic.

The Education Gap of Latinos in the United States

The education pipeline refers to a series of transitions between academic institutions through which students move to achieve a higher level of educational attainment. States focus on the education pipeline as a way to provide opportunities for students to move from secondary to postsecondary education, and in turn contribute to the economic well-being of the state. Many educational administrators focus their policies around this idea of the education pipeline which commonly is considered to consist of four transitions: graduation from secondary school; entrance into postsecondary school; persistence in postsecondary school; and graduation from postsecondary school (Educational Pipeline). Therefore, the discussion of Latino Americans and the barriers they face along the education pipeline refers to all the points along this path where Latino students drop out and sometimes the causes for doing so are not systemic.

In 2007 the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) found that only 53.2% of Latinos who enter ninth grade are reported to complete 12th grade and graduate from high school. This rate is compared to 75% of all white students that graduate high school and 50% of all black students in

the same cohort(Kohler and Lazarin). These disparities suggest that our educational system is not sufficiently equipped to prevent such dropouts from occurring. Furthermore, a critical aspect of this discussion is that a high school degree is nationally considered to be the base-level of education necessary to become a contributing member of society. With graduation rates hovering around 50% for certain populations, there are millions of students who are leaving school without the necessary tools to achieve success and contribute to the overall national economy.

When birthplace is considered in these calculations, native-born immigrants are far more likely to complete high school (75%) than students born in foreign countries (46%). This disparity is correlated to the language barrier faced by many Latino students in our education system. English Language Learner (ELL) programs exist throughout the country to provide intense education on the English language to immigrant students. However, these programs have only achieved limited success. In 2005, 29% of ELL 8th graders scored at or above the basic achievement level for math, compared to 71% of non-ELL 8th graders (Kohler and Lazarin). Therefore, it is plausible that math achievement of ELL students is negatively impacted by teachers speaking only in English. Also, studies have found that most ELL programs exist in linguistically-segregated schools and communities (Kohler and Lazarin). This indicates that, while students may spend class time learning the English language, they are surrounded by their native language in all other environments—increasing the difficulty to succeed in school, graduate from high school, and continue along the education pipeline.

Bilingual education interventions are discussed at length later in this paper. However, it is important to recognize the role that bilingual education (or the lack of bilingual education) plays in the prevalence of Latino students dropping out of high school. With an education system with testing based upon English proficiency, students who lack adequate English language skills are at

an immense comparative disadvantage. Moreover, a linguistic divide in schools inevitably leads to a cultural divide. Without intervention, case studies have shown that students quickly become disconnected with their school community and seek other avenues for engagement. Educational institutions must educate students through encouraging them to participate in their education. However, if students cannot understand or relate the material to their language and cultural background, that connection is nearly impossible to forge.

The failure of Latino students to succeed in secondary school may also be due in part to the inequity of resource allocation to school districts given that a community's wealth correlates with the resources available to the schools in the area. School districts in most states in the country determine their budget through a valuation of properties in the district and a calculation of a property tax rate. These property taxes serve as a primary source of funding for a school. This is often seen to be an inequitable model. If the majority of residents in a particular district are upper income families, there is a correlation indicating that their properties will be of greater value than that of a low-income family. This district will therefore contribute more money to the school district than a community of low-income families whose properties have a relatively low value. Furthermore, high-income residents are generally willing to pay a higher property tax to improve the schools. While low-income community members may want to improve the schools as well, they simply cannot afford to pay higher taxes. This system, combined with the publicly elected education council members, leads to disproportionately-sized school budgets across communities.

Based on 2006 data collected by the National Council of La Raza, 88% of high-minority schools (considered to be schools with a student body that is greater than 90% minority) in the United States are also high-poverty schools (Kohler and Lazarin). Based on the previously

described funding for school districts, this correlation indicates that minority students experience under-funded schools to a greater extent than non-minority students. Many minority students, therefore, may be facing economic and language challenges in a school with insufficient resources. With these difficulties predetermined, the stresses of living in poverty and the desire to contribute to the family income can be large driving forces for students to drop out of school. If the schools do not convince students of the worth that exists in a high school diploma through innovative curricula and programming, a student with other obligations will have a very small chance of remaining in school through graduation.

The inequitable resource allocation at public schools (based on property taxes) is evident in per-student expenditures in various districts throughout New York State. In 2006, in the school district with the lowest poverty level in NY, the per-student expenditures exceed that of the highest-poverty district by \$2,927. Comparatively, the school district with the lowest minority population spends \$2,626 more per student than the school district with the highest minority population (Kohler and Lazarin). This not only creates a clear linkage between poverty and demographic distribution in our schools, but it is an argument for a different financing system for our school districts. Advocates for this issue argue that the economic burdens of individuals in impoverished communities will never be lifted if children in schools are not provided with the resources to achieve an education and contribute to the success of their communities. The cycle of inadequate education and economic disadvantage is very prevalent in Latino communities throughout the United States. By increasing access up the education pipeline for Latino students, this connection can be broken.

College enrollment among Latinos has increased significantly between 1977 and 2010 to the point where 9% of all Bachelor's degrees and 13% of all Associate degrees were received by

Hispanic students. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, this increase is due to the population growth as well as an overall increase in eligibility. However, there are considerable reforms yet to be made to increase access and completion of college among Latino students (Fry and Lopez). If a student does graduate from high school and is seeking a greater degree of education, he or she may continue through the education system in a variety of different institutions. As of 2011, Latinos have a 14% lower college graduation rate than their white counterparts. Only 19% of Latinos have earned an associate's degree or higher compared to 38% of all adults (College Board). However, these numbers do reflect improvements over the last several years.

This brief overview of the education gap in the United States demonstrates how Latino students lack the support to graduate from high school and continue up the education pipeline. With such a large segment of the American population struggling to succeed academically, the need for change is understood. But what must also be understood is how this gap could continue to widen over the next 50 years and the potential value-lost if gains in achievement are not fully realized. The Latino population is both growing and struggling to graduate from high school. If this pattern continues, a greater proportion of our overall American population will be on the negative end of the education gap. Education policy makers must consider the impact this will have on the educational attainment level of this country as a whole. It remains self-evident that we live in an interconnected country where one individual's failures and achievements have the potential to contribute to the well-being of a larger community.

Effects of the Latino Education Gap

The socioeconomic impact of failing to graduate high school can be understood on multiple levels: Individual, Community, and Society. On the personal level, individuals without

adequate education have difficulty finding gainful employment and often live on or below the poverty line. At the community level, a large proportion of people without high school diplomas are more likely to engage in criminal activity. Also, given the correlation to poverty, entire communities can find themselves unable to create meaningful opportunities for younger generations so that the best way to succeed in a particular community may be to leave that community. Finally, at the society level, the entire country is impacted through social services, job creation, and health of the overall economy. In looking at these impacts on each level, the need for meaningful education reform for Latino students becomes even more urgent.

Individual

In 2010, a report by the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee revealed that the unemployment rate for young workers (ages 16-24) in the United States reached a record 19.6% in April of that year. Young workers comprise 13% of the labor force but 26% of the unemployed. These numbers, in combination with the fact that, in 2012, 9.8% of Latinos were unemployed compared to 6.3% of whites in the same cohort, it is clear that the population affected by the education gap is further disadvantaged as it relates to employment opportunity. Furthermore, the report found that educational attainment has a recognizable impact on unemployment of young workers. Among young workers without or with a high school diploma, 33% and 24.6% were unemployed in 2010, respectively. Among those with those with some college or at least a bachelor's degree, 14.1% and 8% were unemployed, respectively. While obtaining a high school diploma improves an individual's chances of obtaining a job, continuing along the education pipeline to college has the greatest impact.

The Joint Economic Committee also presented research demonstrating that long-term unemployment, especially early in a worker's career, can have lasting detrimental effects in that individual's professional life. These impacts are known as "scarring effects"—as individuals may be scarred from their period of unemployment to such an extent that limits them throughout the rest of their career. Unemployment is correlated with a decrease in productivity and lifetime earnings as well as a deterioration of overall well-being due to the physical and economic stressors of unemployment. To increase a student's likelihood of graduating from high school and continuing to college is to increase that student's employment opportunities and overall quality of life.

Community

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2010, 15.1% of Hispanics ages 16 to 24 are not in school and have not received an equivalent to a high school diploma (referred to as status dropout rate). This rate compares to just 5% of white 16 to 24 year olds that have dropped out. Furthermore, the drop-out rate for male Hispanics is greater at 17.3%, compared to 5.9% for white males (US Department of Education). Looking at drop-out rates forces scholars, advocates and policy makers to ask the question: what opportunities are available to these young people in the current economy? We must also consider the larger societal impact of dropout rates. What kind of an impact are these individuals having on their communities? Are they contributing in meaningful ways or are they held back by their lack of education? The answers to these questions must inform education policy decisions because as the student body is changing and, according to population projections, will continue to change, it is important to understand the effects on our society if our schools do not change as well.

According to a national nonprofit organization “Fight Crime: Invest in Kids” the correlation between high school dropouts and crime is positive. High school dropouts are three and a half times more likely than a high school graduate to be arrested and eight times more likely to be incarcerated. Furthermore, research has shown that a ten percent increase in high school graduation rates translates into a twenty percent reduction in crime rate (Christeson, et. al.). The significant statistical correlation between crime and dropout rates implies that the dropout crisis is not only an education and an economic issue, but it is also a public safety issue. Fight Crime has invested considerable resources into research and advocacy for better education of inner-city and high-minority schools based on the premise that improving education will create safer communities.

Society

In the demographic breakdown of the United States, the component of age plays a considerable role when relating to education. While Latinos presently comprise 17% of the total US population, they make up 23% of the country’s children, ages 18 and under. Nearly one-quarter of the student body is Latino—and the education system has made limited language and cultural adjustments to include this population. Moreover, this growing child population can also be described as the most economically disadvantaged—as more children in poverty are Latino than any other demographic group. Following the recession of 2007-2010, 35% of all Latino children are in poverty—amounting to 6.1 million. Throughout the recession, the Latino children in poverty grew by 36.3%, also more than any other population group. With these numbers, we see that Latino children in today’s society are facing economic disadvantages before even entering the classroom.

During the time period of the recession, the Pew Hispanic Center finds that Latinos faced an overall disproportionate negative impact to their personal finances. For example, between 2005 and 2009, the median household wealth among Latinos fell by 66%, compared to 53% among Blacks and 16% among Whites. Furthermore, Latino unemployment rose from 6.3% in 2007 to 11% in 2011—compared to the national increase from 5% to 8.5%. In correlation with the Latino children poverty rate, the poverty rate among all Latinos rose 6 points between 2006 and 2010, at which point it was recorded to be 26.6% (Taylor, et. al.). The combination of growing immigration and a lack of economic opportunity require an intervention at some level of educational or professional development to result in improved outcomes. Through studying the correlation between academic completion and income, it is relatively understood that this intervention must stem from education. However, the education system for Latino students has been primarily exclusive—leading to an achievement gap along ethnic lines.

There is a prevalent correlation between the academic achievement of parents and the poverty rate of children. Among Latino children with parents whom have a high school degree or less, 79.3% are in poverty (according to Pew Hispanic Center). When that is compared to Latino children of parents with some or complete college education, the numbers drop dramatically to 16.6% and 4%, respectively. While it is not a surprise that education is a contributing factor to poverty, the correlation in the Latino population is incredibly strong.

These statistics validate the sobering reality that Latinos are immigrating to the United States in record numbers and are facing serious challenges to succeed economically. However, it would be unfair to report the challenges that Latinos face in the United States without also discussing the contributions that Latino immigrants as well as all other immigrants make to the United States economy. A 2011 White House report entitled “Building a 21st Century

Immigration System” report that immigrants are “30% more likely to start a new business than our non-immigrants and they represent 16.7% of all new business owners in the United States” (White House 11) These contributions by immigrants add considerable value to the US economy. By increasing opportunities for Latinos to succeed academically and therefore economically, there will be an inarguable impact on job creation and overall health of the US economy.

This correlation further emphasizes the salience of the economic status of the Latino population and the argument that improving educational opportunities for Latinos will benefit not only Latinos, but the entire US population through economic growth. Anthony Carnevale, the Director of the Center on Education and The Workforce at Georgetown University said, “The economic success of America is bound tightly to the economic success of our growing Latino population” (Palmer). We must therefore consider this not only a problem for one population, but for the entire country.

With all of this information presented, it is clear that a negative feedback loop exists for Latinos in the United States. From immigration, to education, to economic opportunities, this population is not being provided with the resources necessary to succeed. This creates a cycle of poverty that we are far too familiar with in this country. But now, we are seeing this cycle take place with a population that is growing exponentially. If there is no valuable intervention in this cycle through education reform, there is the potential for a cultural and economic divide to develop in this country. The most effective way to prevent this divide is through substantive education reform that includes Latino children in the education pipeline.

Areas of potential greatest impact for Latino Educative Achievement (NY, TX, CA)

To illustrate this negative feedback loop and its threat to the economy, one can examine the three states with the largest Gross Domestic Product in the country; California, Texas, and New York (listed in rank order). As previously mentioned, these three states are home to 46% of all immigrants in the United States, demonstrating that the success of the US economy is largely contingent upon the success of this population. Yet, these three states, despite their large economies, are not immune to the education gap. In fact, it is as prevalent in those states as in many others. In California in 2010-2011, 70% of Latinos graduated high school compared to 85% of whites. In New York, 63% of Latinos graduated compared to 86% of whites. Finally, in Texas, 82% of Latinos graduated compared to 92% of whites (Nhan). All three states have a gap of 10 percentage points or more between Latino and White student graduation rates. Given these rates and the correlation between education and employment, the unemployment gaps in these states are also not surprising. In California, 11.9% of Latinos were unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2012 compared to 7.8% of whites. In New York, 10.6% of Latinos were unemployed compared to 7% of whites. And in Texas, 7% of Latinos were unemployed compared to 4.3% of whites (Austin). We must now ask the question, as the Latino population rates grow in these states and the rest of the country, and the education and unemployment gaps grow wider, what impact will this have on the overall economy?

What can be done: creating a networked intervention approach

In an attempt to close the education gap in the United States, there have been several pieces of legislation passed and programs enacted at the community, state and national levels—all with varied success. The federal and state governments have enacted mandates and allocated

funding to support intervention programs. However, there is a pattern of insufficient resources, inadequate oversight, and a misunderstanding of the needs of each community. Furthermore, community organizations have seen great success with some of the programs implemented. However, these successes in reducing the dropout rate among Latino students are in isolated communities and do not have the capability to expand to other communities and enact large-scale reform. These communities have a valuable knowledge source and understanding of the needs of the students. But this knowledge is not being leveraged by government to the extent possible. What is needed, therefore, is a networked approach to drop-out prevention that utilizes community organizations to expand their programs and enact systemic change. Such an approach would address the language and cultural barriers to Latino education on a large scale to create a more inclusive education system.

One example of the relationship between federal and state governments with local organizations as it relates to drop-out prevention is the development of programs to address students with English as a second language, also referred to as English Language Learners (ELL). Much of the discussion around improving graduation rates among Latinos in the US has to do with advancing the education of ELL students. If students cannot fully understand the language of our schools, they will not be able to pass the examinations and attain a degree. For the many Latino students who do have English as a first language, the narrative of ELL intervention is relevant as well for it demonstrates that our schools have not been able to relate to language and/or culture of the students in our classrooms. While a Latino student may not struggle with the reading in English class, he or she may struggle with relating to the American and European literature. Therefore, in understanding what works in language education for Latino students, we can infer and expand interventions to all Latino students.

The United States federal government first signaled a commitment to bilingual education in its passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). This legislation, for the first time, provided local school districts the opportunity to apply for federal grants to establish innovative programs for English Language Learners. This legislation had limited success in improving the opportunities for ELL students to achieve academically. However, in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act placed even greater limits on what this legislation could achieve. Its name was changed to the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. Furthermore, federal funding is now, due to NCLB, directed to state education departments to distribute at their discretion. There was also a cap placed on the amount of funding that could be provided—a cap that was half the amount previously available (Woodward, 2011).

While the federal funding for education for ELL students is limited, state education departments are still making efforts to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to succeed academically, no matter their native language. New York State Education Department (NYSED), for example, has put in place regulations requiring that all schools conduct screenings of every new student to determine if the student requires any special accommodations such as bilingual education. Furthermore, if any school has 20 or more students with a native language other than English, and the native language of those students is the same, the school is required to offer English as a Second Language (ESL) or a Bilingual Education Program. These schools must then submit applications to the NYSED to receive grant funding for these programs (Woodward, 2011). While these requirements portray a state-wide commitment to improving the education of Latino youth, evidence shows a lack of oversight has led to noncompliance by many school districts.

The New York Latino Research and Resources Network (NYLARNet) has conducted two surveys of compliance to the above described bilingual education provisions by school districts in New York State. In 2009, NYLARNet found that 38% of schools were classified as being programmatically or procedurally noncompliant during the 2006-2007 academic year. In 2011, the noncompliance rate for the 2007-2008 academic year had only a minor reduction to 35% (Woodward, 2009). During this time, when many schools are inadequately serving their ELL students, the Latino population in NYS increased from 15% in 2000 to 18% in 2010. What is more, NYLARNet found that 23% of Spanish language bilingual education teachers in NYS were not properly certified (Woodward, 2011). At the time when the Latino population is increasing, a state with one of the largest national Latino populations is struggling to provide basic language education to students in need. With an education system built with standardized tests exclusively in English, it is the responsibility of school districts to ensure that all students are proficient in the English language while also preserving an appreciation for their native language and culture.

There is an understanding in the United States as it relates to Latino education that students with Spanish as their native language need to be provided additional resources beginning in elementary school to be able to achieve academic success. However, as discovered by NYLARNet in NYS as well as many other studies, this need is simply not being fulfilled. Even in cases when schools provide ESL or bilingual education programs, some studies find that these programs may be inadequate. Programs such as these isolate ELL students from the entire school population, limiting their academic and cultural interactions with English-speaking students. By separating this population, schools also face the challenge of gaining community support for the programs. However, another NYLARNet Report entitled “Putting Languages on

a Level Playing Field” found that there is an alternative to these traditional bilingual programs: dual-language education programs (Cortina).

Compared to traditional ESL or bilingual programs, dual-language programs engage with both Spanish and English speaking students in two-way language education. Students are able to learn from one another in an environment that is accepting and appreciative of ELL students. In this program, ELL students are not treated as though their native language is a problem that needs to be overcome. Rather, they are taught the value in becoming bilingual and are able to share their language and culture with other students. Furthermore, English language students are provided with the opportunity to learn Spanish at a young age and engage with the Latino culture—removing the possibility of a cultural divide developing in the school (Cortina). Programs such as the dual-language programs in NYC that NYLARNet studied, have proved successful through the broad-based involvement of parents (of both ELL and non-ELL students), community education councils, and school leadership. The broad based analysis of the negative consequences that Latino dropouts can have on the United States demonstrate that this issue requires the involvement of every demographic group to ensure that all children are receiving the best educational opportunities possible.

In the current federal administration, immigration reform and the success of the Latino community has become a priority. The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans which began under President George H.W. Bush has been renewed by President Obama. This initiative has set forth recommendations for public-private partnerships, a national exchange of resources on the issue, as well as a commitment to provide support at the community level. In many communities, schools have utilized their resources and ingenuity to foster improved educational development. For example, Mount Pleasant High School in San

Jose, California, offers courses on Hispanic literature in an effort to further engage students who may feel disconnected with other American history and literature classes. The effectiveness of these two types of policies—“top-down” and “bottom-up”—separately, is limited. However, their complementary, concurrent implementation can ensure that fewer students fall through the cracks of the education pipeline. Eliminating the barriers that Latino students face in the education pipeline will disrupt the existing negative feedback loop and provide increasingly more opportunities for economic and social success.

Latino voting power: the new political force in the US

It has long been understood that an education gap exists in the United States between the white and minority students. For several decades, education departments and nonprofit organizations throughout the country have designed and implemented new programs in an attempt to address this issue. But with the rise of voting power among Latinos in the US, the concern about this gap has garnered significant political attention. In the 2012 Presidential election, President Obama received 71% of the Latino vote, compared to 67% in 2008 (Rodriguez). Major media outlets called on the Republican Party to adapt their policies to be more supportive of the Latino population. This change, many argued, is vital if the Republican Party wants to compete on a national level. Furthermore, many “battleground” states have begun to lean in a certain direction due in large part to their increase in Latino voters. Texas, for example, a classic “red” state, is considered by many political analysts to be a battleground state in future elections because of its growing Latino population. As national voting patterns continue to transition based on the changing demographics of the country, elected officials recognize the need to address concerns such as dropout intervention in order to maintain a broad level of support from the American public.

The timing for meaningful education reform in the country is upon us. Congress is currently debating possible legislation on pathways to citizenship for illegal immigrants—one of which may be through higher education (based on the failed DREAM act to provide students with citizenship after completion of a college degree). This legislation, once coupled with fines, payment of back taxes, and other stipulations, has large-scale support among the American public. Furthermore, as the projected rise in Latinos in the US is due partly to increased immigration as well as birth rates of Latinos already in the US, there is a growing understanding of a dual focus on both adjusting our immigration system and providing more adequate support for the millions of Latinos living in the United States currently. Furthermore, with an economy that is only slowly recovering from a recession, education reform is a viable way of investing in the future and providing increased economic opportunity that can help grow the economy as a whole.

As discussed, the perpetuation of this education gap with Latino students will negatively impact the United States on the individual, community, and societal level. This lack of achievement will affect the economic attainment of an entire population, leading to a class divide by demographic in the country that is more significant than at present time. However, as this feedback loop continues, an increased number of Latinos will be eligible to vote. An even greater increase in voting by the Latino population is very likely to effect change at multiple levels of government. As the demand for change grows, federal and state governments need to support the expansion of local initiatives, develop inclusive curricula, and encourage Latino Americans to become more involved in educational administration throughout the country. These initiatives have the potential to improve the economic, social, and political well-being of the United States

by establishing an educational system that is equitable and advantageous to a modern and diverse nation.

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