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A Comparison of Latino, Black, and White Educational Achievement Levels in the Chicago Metropolitan Area

Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

A COMPARISON OF LATINO, BLACK, AND WHITE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS IN THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA

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In this report we compare the educational achievement levels of Latinos in the Chicago metropolitan area with those of non-Latino whites and African Americans. We introduce into this analysis the residential distribution of these groups between the city of Chicago and the suburbs. We also look at the composition of the Latino metro population, and the paper concludes with some suggestions about focusing policy to improve the educational status of Latinos.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Currently, Latinos living in suburban areas comprise a slight majority of the Latino population in the Chicago metropolitan area. Approximately 55 percent of all Latinos in the metro area live in the suburbs and 45 percent live in the city. Comparisons across ethnic groups that place Latinos as one of the most affected by educational underachievement unfortunately still hold true when the distinction between urban and suburban residence is taken into account (see FIGURE 1).

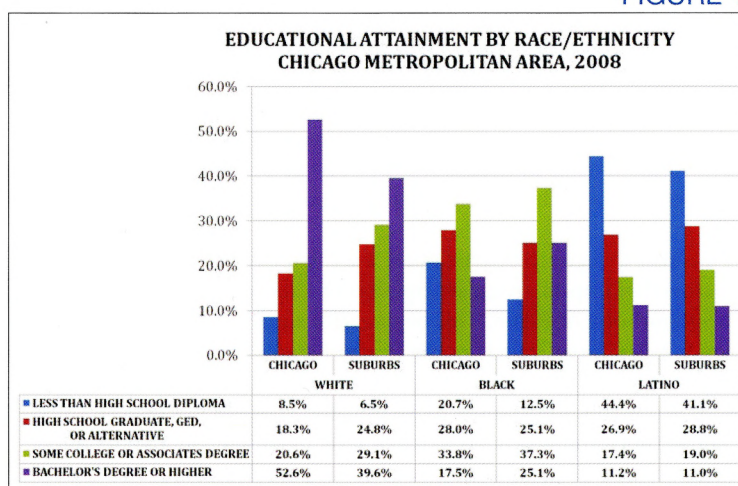
Latinos' educational achievement levels in the city and the suburbs are very similar for every educational category. There are slightly more Latinos with less than high school education in the city than in the suburbs, 44.4 percent and 41.1 percent respectively. In the remaining educational achievement categories -high school graduate or its equivalent, some college education or an associate college degree, and a bachelor's degree or higher- suburban Latinos exceed their Latino urban counterparts by small percentages (see FIGURE 1). Thus, one can conclude that Latinos' educational achievement is slightly better in the suburbs than in the city, but only by a small margin.

Latinos in both the suburbs and the city have higher percentages of individuals with less than high school education than non-Latino whites or blacks, with blacks' percentages second to Latinos'. At the bachelor's degree level or higher whites come at the top, followed by blacks, with Latinos last. In both the city and the suburbs blacks have the highest percentages of individuals with some college or associate degree and Latinos have the lowest. Suburban Latinos

have the highest percentage (28.8 percent) of those with a high school certificate, GED, or equivalent education, and urban Latinos' percentage comes very close to that of urban blacks at this level. (see FIGURE 1)

In summary, among the three groups compared Latinos are the most likely to have less than high school education, while whites are the most likely to achieve a bachelor's college degree or higher, and blacks are the most likely to have some college education or an associate's degree.

FIGURE 1



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

MEXICAN-ORIGIN LATINOS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Latinos of Mexican origin constitute approximately 79 percent of the total Latino population of the Chicago metropolitan area, followed by 9 percent Puerto Ricans, 3 percent Central Americans, 3 percent South Americans, less than 1 percent Dominicans, and 5 percent of other Latinos (Alejo and Knight 2008). Given their numbers, it is portanto inquire specifically about the educational achievement of the Mexican-origin Latino majority in the area.

The percentages of Mexicans with less than high school education in the city and suburbs of Chicago are 44 percent and 40 percent respectively (see FIGURE 2A and 2B), which are by far the highest, for both the city and the suburbs, of all the ethnic groups compared. By contrast, the percentages of the Cuban-origin population with less than high school education in the city and the suburbs are 22 percent and 15 percent respectively, which are closer to those of the non-Latino ethnic groups compared. The percentages of Mexicans with high school education or higher in the city and suburbs are 56 percent and 60 percent respectively, the lowest percentages among all the ethnic groups compared, including Cubans with 78 percent and 85 percent. (see FIGURE 2A and 2B)

FIGURE 2A

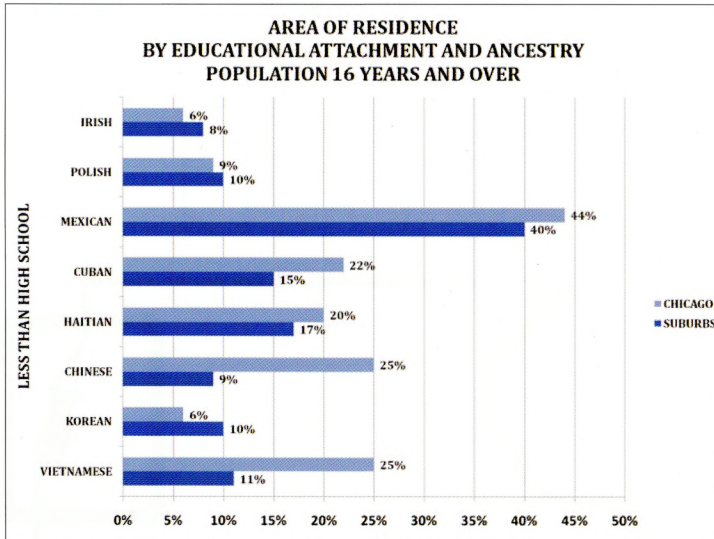
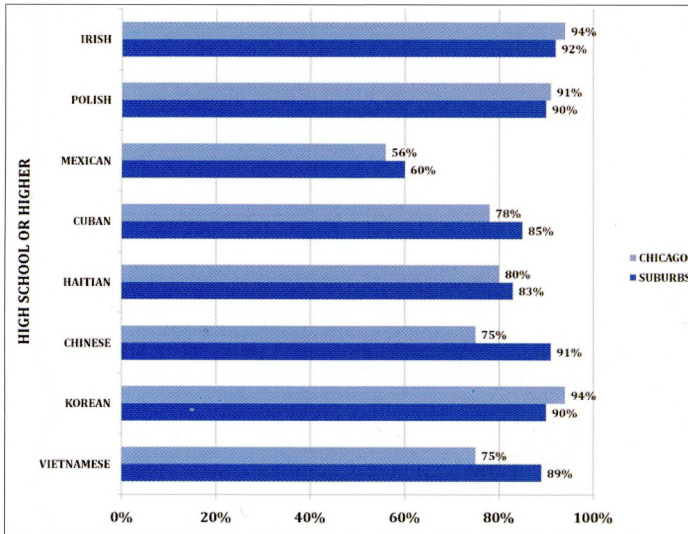


FIGURE 2B



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

The percentages of educational underachievement shown here include migrants and immigrants in the Chicago metropolitan area, so the totals of those with less than high school education probably include foreign-born people who dropped out of school in their countries before coming to the United States. However, data from Chicago-area public schools demonstrate that dropping out before obtaining a high school diploma is definitely a problem among people who attend school here, especially in the city of

Chicago, and that Latino students are faring worse than their non-Latino counterparts. Table 1 shows that the graduation rate for all students is higher in the suburban high schools than in the city of Chicago public school system by 24.2 percent. In addition, the graduation rates for Latino students show that the Latino high school graduation rate is higher in the suburban public high schools than in the Chicago public high schools by 22.3 percent. Thus, the problem of educational underachievement in the city and suburbs is not only due to the presence of migrants or immigrants but is also endemic to the high school education system, although it is more pervasive in the urban than in the suburban high schools.

TABLE 1. GRADUATION RATES IN CHICAGO-AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2008

	URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS [CITY OF CHICAGO]	SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOLS [METRO CHICAGO SUBURBS]
ALL STUDENTS	MEAN GRADUATION RATE 67.35% SAMPLE SIZE 68 schools	MEAN GRADUATION RATE 91.56% SAMPLE SIZE 150 schools
LATINO STUDENTS	MEAN GRADUATION RATE 65.18% SAMPLE SIZE 62 schools	MEAN GRADUATION RATE 87.52% SAMPLE SIZE 149 schools

SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Education, 2008

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of low educational achievement is severe for Latinos, both in the city of Chicago, where blacks are also quite badly affected, and the suburbs. Latinos and blacks in the Chicago metropolitan area drop out of high school in larger numbers than whites and have low percentages of college graduates, with Latinos faring worst on both counts. Policies should focus on the needs of Latinos and blacks in the city and suburbs to improve their educational achievement levels and graduate more of their young people from college, given the significant percentages who stop their education short of obtaining a bachelor's degree certificate. As this report shows, policymakers and researchers should pay attention to high school dropout rates in the Chicago metro-area high schools, which are particularly high for Latinos and significantly worse overall in the urban high schools than in their suburban counterparts. Finally, Latino-focused education policies should address the specific needs of Mexican-origin students -immigrants and US born- since among all ethnic groups, both other Latinos and non-Latinos, Mexican-origin Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate and the lowest rate of more than high school educational achievement in the Chicago metropolitan area.

REFERENCE

Alejo, Berenice, with Roger Knight. 2008. *The Latino Landscape: A Metro Chicago Guide and Nonprofit Directory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies.

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