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A Dream Attained or Deferred? Examination of Production, Placement, and Transition into the Principalship of Latina/o Educators in Texas

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Abstract

The demographics of the student population enrolled in U.S. schools is quickly evolving, with dramatic increases in the number and percentage of English Language Learner students (Garcia, 2012), immigrant youth, and Latino/a students (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Increased pressures on educators to increase student test scores and to close test score achievement gaps raises questions about the degree to which school leaders are prepared to meet these challenges. Research shows school leaders prepared to deeply understand various student backgrounds and cultures tend to be more effective in ensuring positive outcomes for all students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Yet scant research has examined the frequency of racial/ethnic matches between principals and students and how the dynamics of production and career advancement might influence the prevalence of such matches. Specifically, no empirical studies have examined the transition rate of Latino assistant principals (APs) into principalship positions, or how the rate compares to the rates of peers with different racial/ethnic backgrounds. With Texas as an example, we asked:

- What percentage of principals and assistant principals was Latino over the last 20 years?
- What percentage of majority Latino schools has been led by Latino principals in the last 20 years?
- Do Latino assistant principals become principals at the same rate as their peers?
- What is the time frame for advancement of Latino assistant principals to the principalship in relation to their peers?

This study uses multiple state administrative data sets that show the employment status and individual characteristics of APs, principals, and the student demographics of schools from 1990 through 2008. We examined the transition rates of APs to principals across multiple cohorts of APs over extended time periods. Ultimately, we examined 112,342 assistant principal years and 118,883 principal years over the 18-year time frame to determine the percentages of employed APs and principals.

Keywords: school leadership, Latino educators, principals, Latino education

Introduction, Rationale, and Research Questions

School leaders play powerful roles in determining whether PK-12 public schools are successful. Empirical studies show that school leaders can promote school effectiveness and academic capacity and, at least indirectly, improve student performance (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Historically, Latino students have demonstrated lower academic achievement and graduation rates than other student groups. Though all student groups have made gains related to high school completion rates, Latinos are still less likely to finish high school than their White, Asian, and Black peers (Fry & Parker, 2012; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010) and are also more likely to be affected by the impact of living in poverty (Lopez & Cohn, 2012; Lopez & Velasco, 2011). The lag in Latino student achievement is cause for concern as the Latino student population has surged dramatically in recent years, particularly in the southern states.

This points to the urgency for leadership programs to prepare competent and culturally aware PK-12 leaders who understand the concerns of Latino communities and who will strive to improve the academic outcomes of Latino students. Research shows school leaders prepared to deeply understand varying student backgrounds and cultures tend to be more effective in ensuring positive outcomes for all students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Arguably, Latino administrators are likely to know and relate to the cultural backgrounds of Latino students. Texas schools currently serve approximately 2.3 million Latino students, or 48% of its total student population (Pew Research Hispanic Center, 2013). The Latino student population in Texas could reach roughly 6 million by 2050 (Smith, 2012). This incredible growth, as exemplified in the Texas context, gives impetus for our examination of potential changes in Texas school leadership. Meier (1993) has demonstrated the importance of having a critical number of Latino administrators in schools to help advocate for Latino students to better represent their interests. Yet, scant research has exam-

ined the frequency of racial/ethnic matches between principals and students, and how the dynamics of production and career advancement might influence the prevalence of such matches. Therefore, this paper examines the production rate of Latino leaders, the rate of transition of Latino assistant principals (APs) into the principalship in Texas, and the timeframe for their advancement into the principalship role. We also examine how Latino APs' transition rate compares with the advancement of White and other racial/ethnic minorities as one aspect of school leadership diversification. In particular, this study has four primary research questions:

1. Do Latina/o individuals obtain principal certification at rates comparable to their White peers?
2. Do Latina/o individuals completing principal certification obtain employment as a principal at the same rate as their White peers?
3. Do Latina/o assistant principals become principals at the same rate as their White peers, and what is the timeframe for advancement of Latino assistant principals to the principalship in relation to their White peers?
4. To what degree have beginning principals and all principals become more racially and ethnically diverse, particularly with respect to the Latina/o population?

Review of the Literature

Though the research on educational leaders in these areas is limited, some scholars have explored the impact of racial/ethnic matching between teachers and students and its influence on student outcomes and teacher expectations for student academic performance. Pigott and Cowen's (2000) study found that racial congruence did not shape teachers' reports of whether a student had more academic competencies or issues adjusting to school. However, a study by Dee (2004) underscored the importance of hiring minority teachers by finding that students paired with same-race teachers in first through third grade demonstrated greater gains in math and science. A later study by Dee (2005) using longitudinal data

revealed that racial/ethnic congruence between students and teachers “has consistently large effects on teacher perceptions of student performance.”

Scholars of educational leadership like Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) call for research on the transition from the assistant principalship to the principalship. At first, the assistant principalship seems the perfect steppingstone, but research has suggested this role has a glass ceiling in place for certain racial/ethnic groups. White males have traditionally dominated PK-12 administration (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Our research seeks to provide evidence of the timeframe of advancement from the assistant principalship into the principalship according to AP race/ethnicity. Studying trends in Texas is important, because the state offers a typical policy context, with many of the requirements and opportunities for leadership licensure and advancement similar to other states across the nation.

Data and Methodology

This study relies on multiple state administrative data sets that document the employment status and individual characteristics of APs and principals and the student demographics of schools from 1990 through 2012. With the data, we could examine employment as an AP, as a principal, and the transition from AP to principals across multiple cohorts of APs and across extended time periods. Ultimately, we examined 112,342 assistant principal years and 118,883 principal years over the 18-year time frame. A principal year is the count of principals and years over time. If an individual was employed for all 18 years, she would generate 18 principal years. We used descriptive statistics to document the percentages of students, teachers, APs, and principals identified as Latino to calculate the percentage of Latino principals in schools with a majority of Latino students. We used logistic regression analysis to compare the odds of a principal certification program graduate being Latino, the odds of a newly certified graduate obtaining employment as either an AP or a principal, and the odds of individual transition from AP to principal.

The Texas Context

Texas has experienced dramatic population growth among its school-aged population, which carries implications for schools, school leaders, and school leadership preparation programs. The number of students enrolled in Texas public schools increased from 3.6 million in 1994 to 4.9 million in 2011, an increase of 36%. Concomitantly, the number of schools and school leaders increased by more than 32% and by almost 71%, respectively. In 1994, there were approximately 10,840 school administrators in 6,443 schools, and in 2012, there were nearly 18,850 school administrators in 8,529 schools. Thus, the demand for school administrators grew substantially, even when excluding the demand created by attrition. Over this time period, the student population became more racially diverse and poorer. The percentage of Latino students in Texas increased from 35.5% in 1994 to 50.8% in 2012, while the percentage of White students decreased from about 48% to only 31%. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students increased as well, from 45% in 1994 to 60% in 2012. Texas has also experienced some big changes in the preparation of educators. In 1987, Texas was the first state to allow alternative teacher certification programs. In 2001, the state allowed nonprofit and for-profit organizations to administer preparation programs. In a sense, Texas has led the nation in the deregulation of educator preparation. Deregulation has led to an increase in both the number and type of educator preparation programs (Figure 1).

Findings

Production

First, as shown in Figure 2, the percentage of newly certified principals who were Latino/a increased only slightly between 1993 and 2011. In 1993, about 11% of those obtaining principal certification were Latino, while the percentage increased to about 16% in 2011. The percentage in 2011 remained

below the percentage of Latino teachers in 2011 by eight percentage points and below the percentage of Latino students by 26 percentage points. Despite the relatively low production of individuals obtaining principal certification, an individual obtaining principal certification in 2011 was 50% more likely to be Latino than in 1993 (Figure 3).

Newly Hired School Leaders

The greater odds of a newly certified principal being Latino translated into greater odds of a beginning school leader (AP or principal) being Latino. Figure 4 reveals the greater likelihood of Latino graduates obtaining school leadership positions over time. Yet, there were clear differences in the odds of becoming an AP or principal. Across all years, Latino graduates were about 50% more likely than White graduates to obtain a position as an AP. However, Latino graduates were statistically significantly less likely than their White peers to become principals in the four years after obtaining certification, and not statistically significantly more or less likely to obtain employment as a principal for years five and six. By year seven, Latino graduates were slightly more likely than their White peers to obtain employment as a principal.

Advancement from Assistant Principal to Principal

The difference in employment between an AP and a principal can be explained by the advancement rate from AP to principal for Latinos. As shown in Figure 5, the Latino advancement rate was about three percentage points lower than the White advancement rate for year one, and then the gap widened over the next three years. After year five, the difference in advancement rates gradually diminished until year 10, when advancement rates were even. Thus, while Latino graduates are initially less likely to be employed as principals, because they become employed as APs, the differences in employment as a principal eventually disappear and actually slightly favor Latinos over Whites.

Beginning Assistant Principals, Principals, and Employment

Ultimately, these trends have served to increase the percentage of beginning Latino APs and principals (Figure 6). The increases, however, have generally been very slow, with only small increases over time for principals (Figure 7). With respect to APs, there was a fairly large increase from 2001 to 2005, but then little growth until 2010. For both APs and principals, the percentage of new Latino hires increased relatively dramatically in 2011, when more than one fourth of all newly hired APs and principals were Latina/o. Despite the improvements in Latino AP representation, there has been less improvement in the percentage of all principals who are Latino, which has grown from about 15% in 1990 to about 20% in 2010 (Figure 7). Change has been very steady but incredibly slow. This increase mirrors the growth in Latino teachers who serve as the pool for APs and principals (Figure 8).

The rise in Latino principals has also not kept pace with the increase in the percentage of schools that enrolled at least 50% Latino students. While the percentage of predominantly Latino schools increased from about 22% to around 40%, the percentage of Latino principals increased from about 15% to 20% over the same time period (Figure 9). Thus, despite gains in the percentage of newly certified principals and beginning school leaders, there is still a large mismatch between both the percentage of Latino students and predominantly Latino schools and the overall percentage of Latina/o principals.

Discussion and Policy Implications

Our findings indicate some positive gains in certification and hiring of Latina/o administrators and their transition between the AP and principal positions. As of 2011, those who obtain principal certification were 50% more likely to be Latino than in 1993, and the overall percentage of newly certified principals who are Latina/o has increased over the same time period. Further, the percentage of newly hired principals and assistant principals who are Lati-

no/a has also increased over time. As of 2011, more than one fourth of all newly hired APs and principals were Latina/o. Although Latinos are initially less likely to be employed as principals because they are employed more often as APs, the differences in employment as a principal eventually disappear and then slightly favor Latinos over Whites.

We call for additional research into the specific certification programs that resulted in increased hiring of Latino administrators. Latinos also still take longer to become administrators than their White peers. Investigation is needed as to why the advancement rate of Latino administrators lags in spite of increased principal certifications. Our research indicates that although Latinos who begin as APs successfully transition into a principalship role, their White counterparts enter principal roles more quickly. More work is needed to understand the reasons contributing to the gap in advancement rates.

Despite the advances in the production and placement of Latino/as in school leadership positions—including the principalship—the percentage of Latino/a school leaders is still far outpaced by the percentage of Latino/a students. More research is needed, and additional strategies should be adopted to hasten the production and placement of Latino/a educators as school leaders.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Percentage of Individuals Obtaining Principal Certification by Race/Ethnicity in Texas (1993-2011)

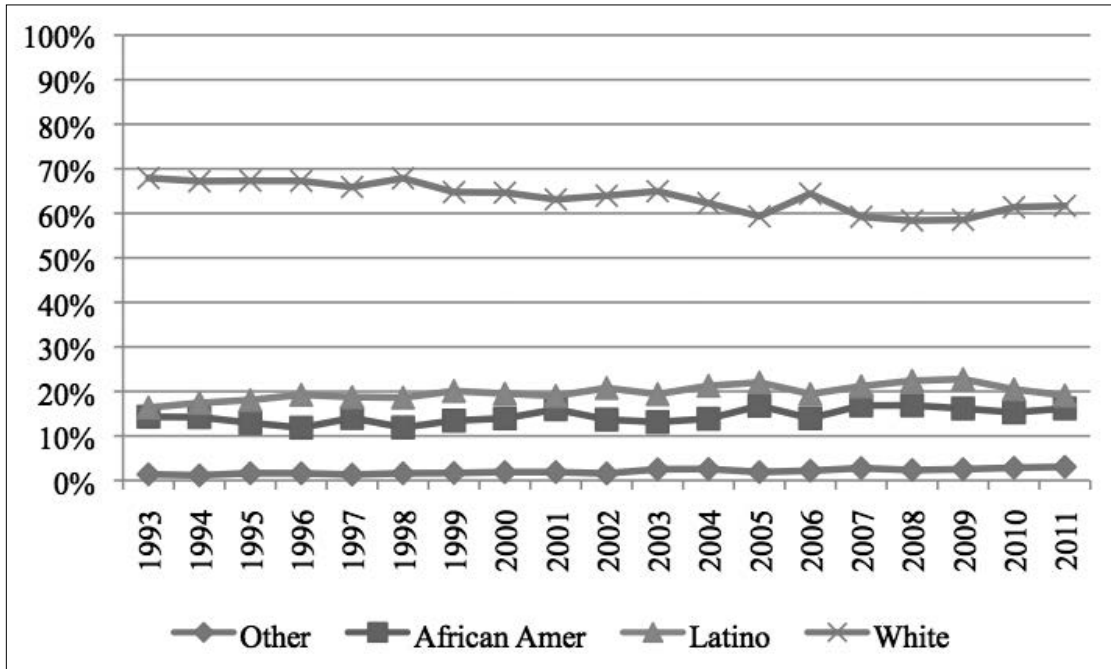


Figure 2: Percentage of Newly Certified Texas Principals by Race/Ethnicity and Certification Year

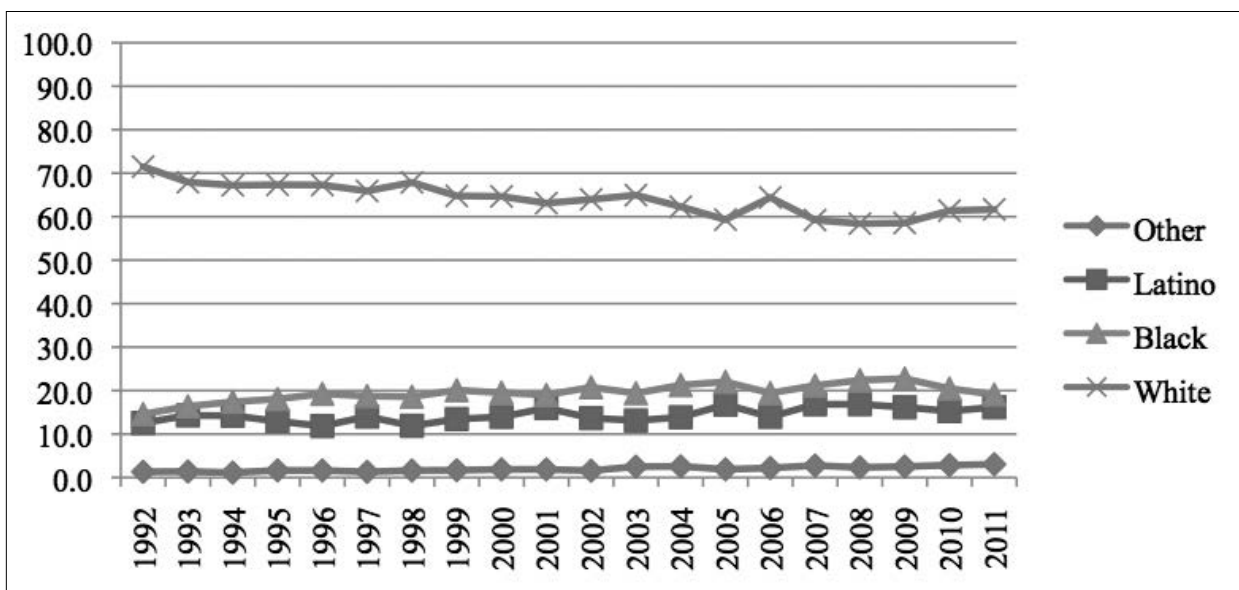


Figure 3: Odds of a Latino Educator Obtaining Principal Certification Relative to 1993

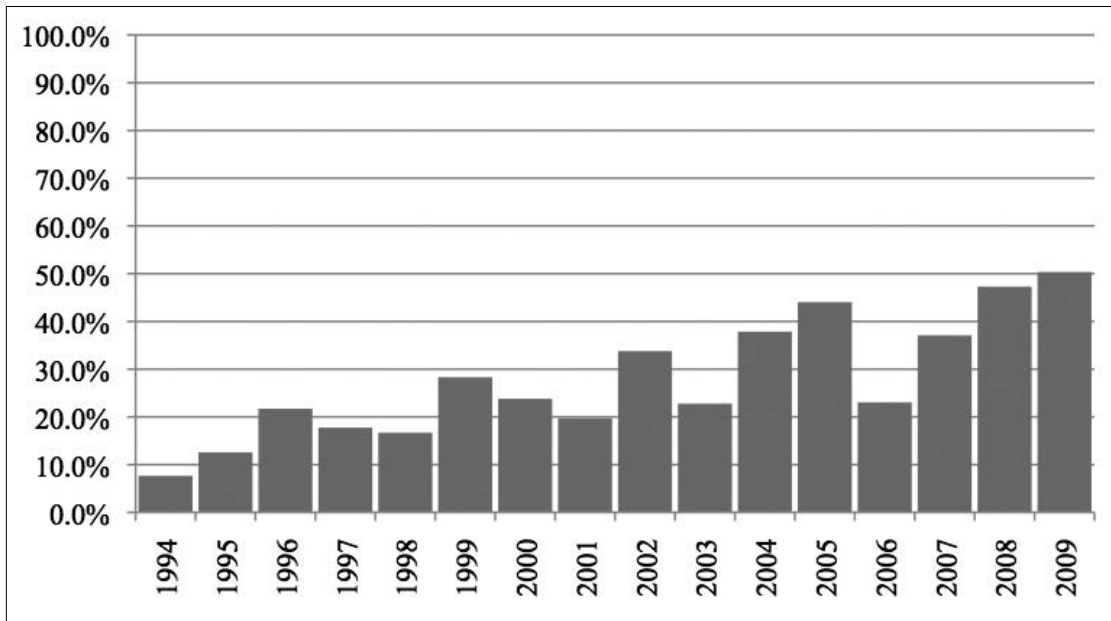


Figure 4: Percentages of Individuals Obtaining Principal Certification Employed as a School Leader (Assistant Principal or Principal)

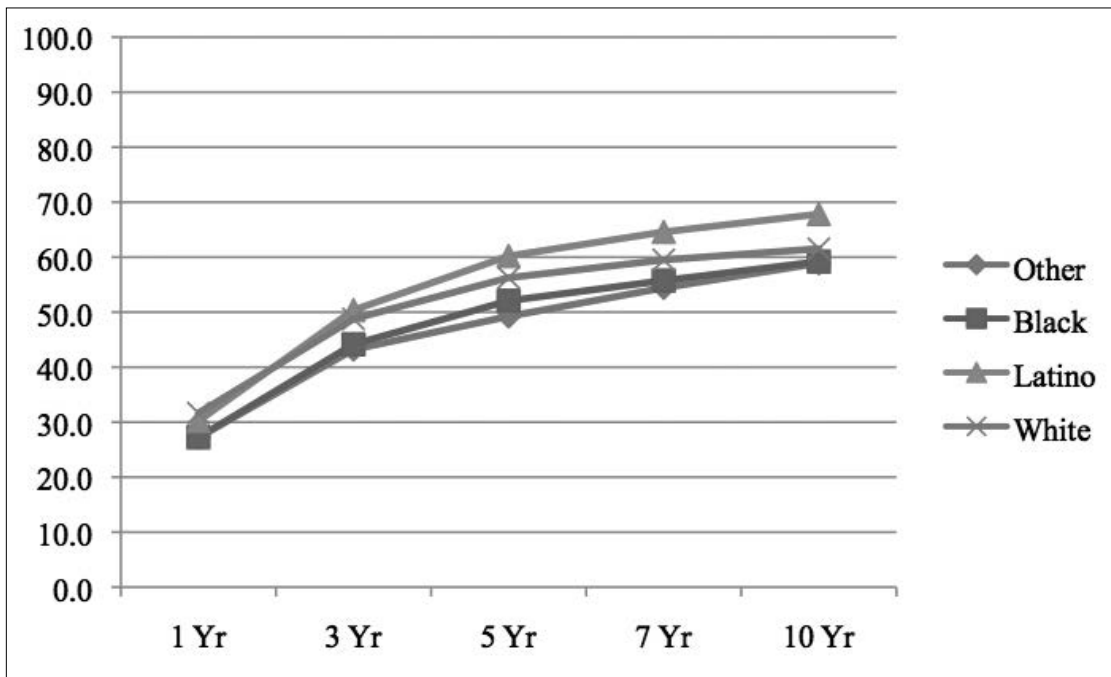


Figure 5: Advancement Rate from Assistant Principal to Principal for Latino and White Assistant Principals

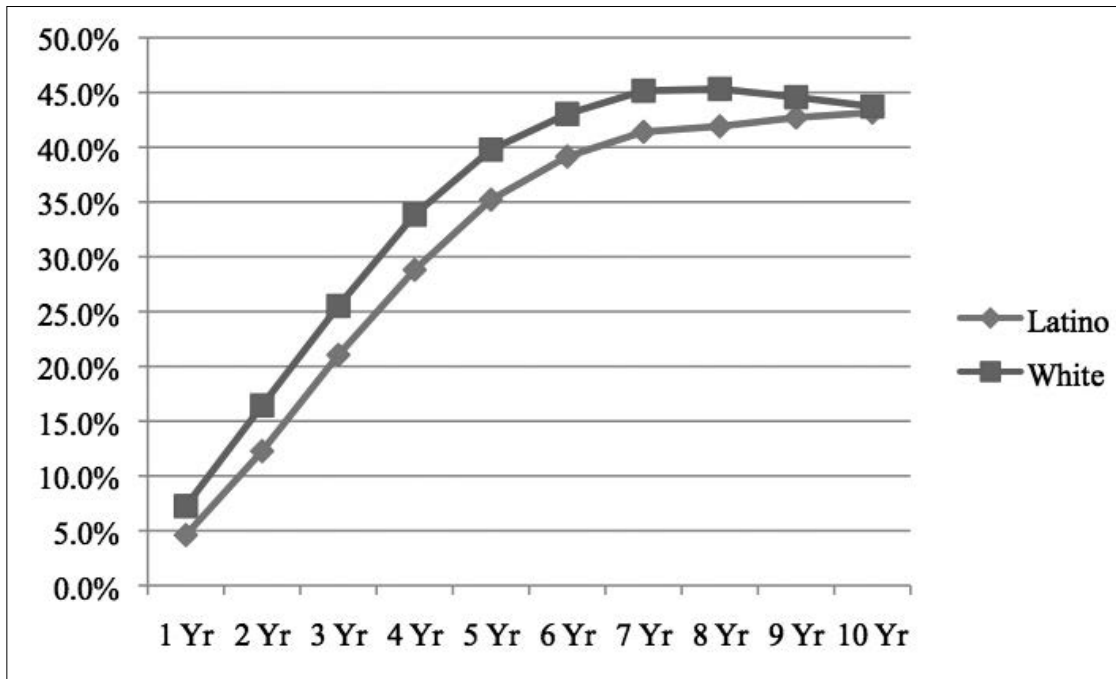


Figure 6: Percentage of Beginning Assistant Principals and Principals Who Were Latino (1995 to 2011)

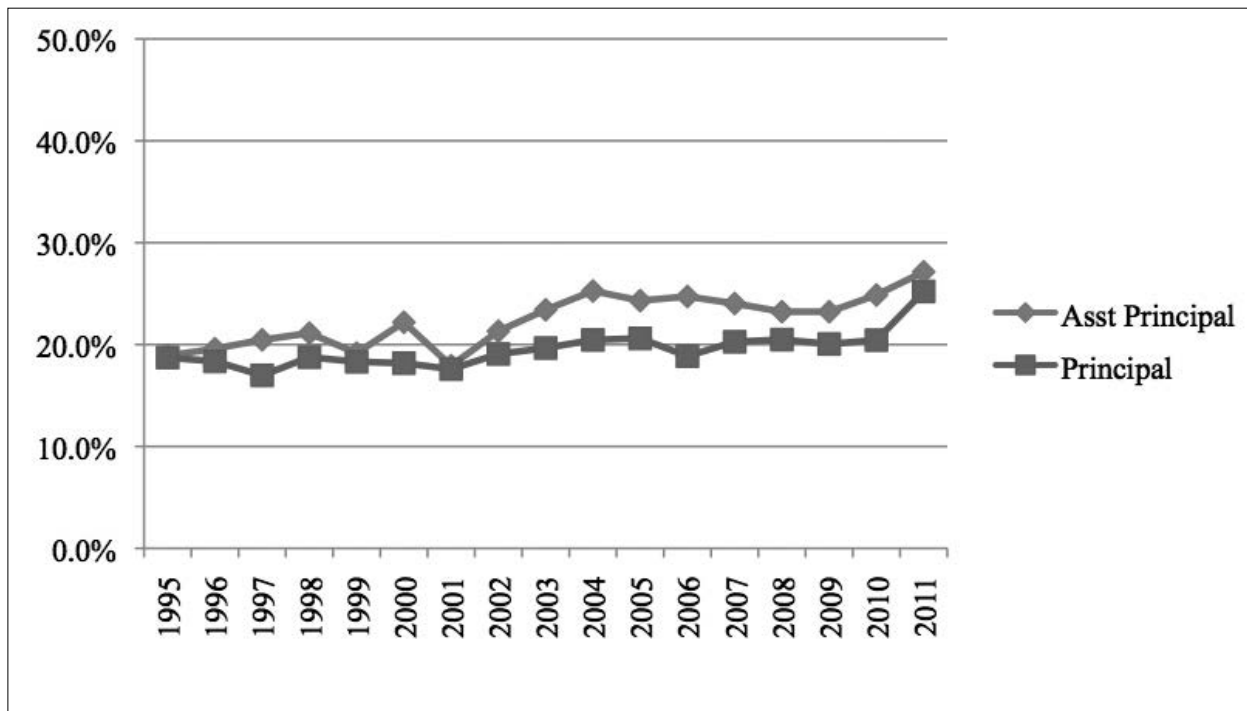


Figure 7: Percentage of All Principals Identified as Latino (1990-2010)

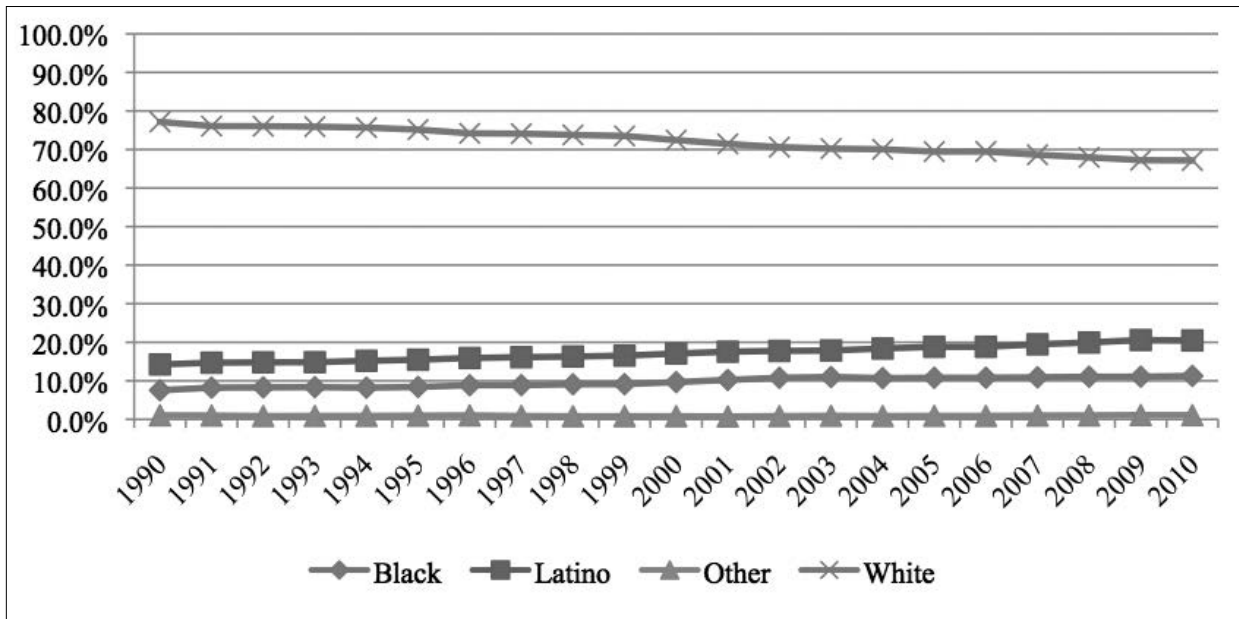


Figure 8: Percentage of Students, Teachers, and Principals Identified as Latino (1990-2012)

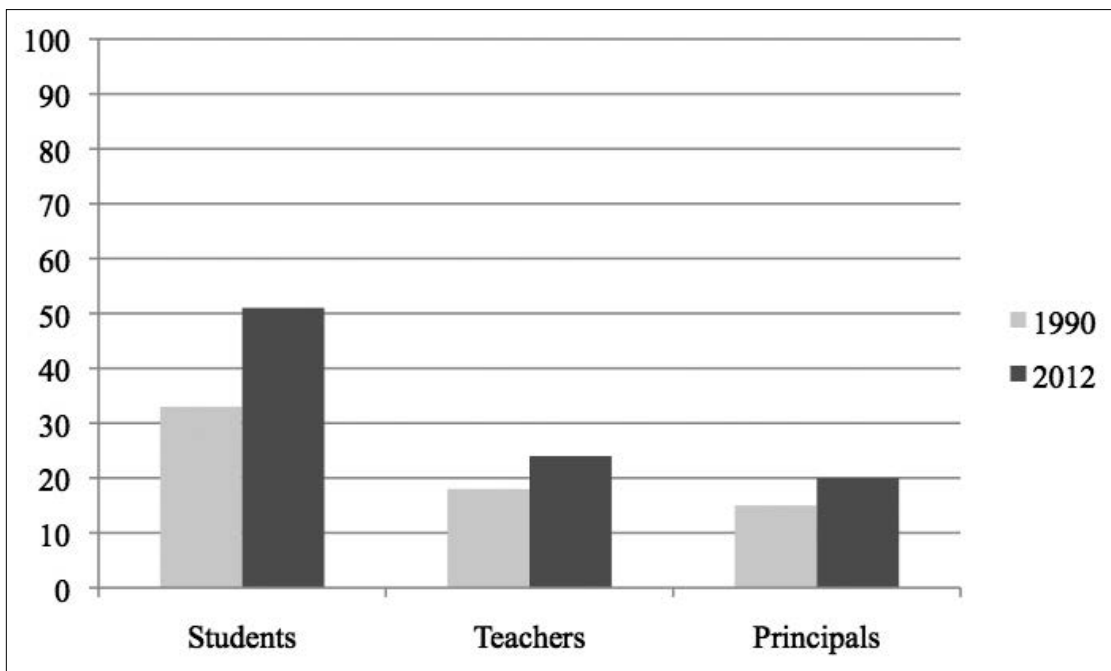


Figure 9: Increase in Latino Student Population Compared to Latino Principals (1990-2010)

