ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF NINTH GRADE LATINO MALE STUDENTS ON FACTORS THAT IMPACT THEIR SCHOOL SUCCESS

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The high school dropout rate is a crisis for the nation, states and local school districts. While District X, a large urban/suburban district in the Mid-Atlantic region graduation rate increased, the Latino subgroup reflected a gap of 11 percentage points. Most of the students in this subgroup are males.

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of 29 Latino male ninth grade students in three District X high schools based on their Early Warning Indicator Report (EWIR) band-green (low risk) or red (high-risk) that support or challenge their successful school engagement and school completion. Further, the study examined the internal pushout, external pullout and supportive pull factors that contribute to or hinder Latino males' school engagement to increase the number of Latino male high school graduates.

Five forty-five minute focus group sessions were conducted. The students completed a nine question demographic survey and responded to a 12 question query to questions regarding their perceptions of the internal, external and supportive factors that support or hinder their school engagement. Using NVivo to analyze responses from the five focus groups, eight main themes were identified Overall, the findings pointed out that green (low risk) were more critical and reflective than their red (high risk) and mixed group peers in each of the eight themes including negative personal outlook.

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF NINTH GRADE LATINO MALE STUDENTS ON FACTORS THAT IMPACT THEIR SCHOOL SUCCESS

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Pearl E. Briscoe, who always shared the importance of education with me. She led by example and helped me to grow into an intelligent, confident, and strong woman. Unfortunately, she did not live to see me receive this degree, but I feel her joy in my accomplishments, large and small, every day.

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"I survived (and thrived) because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me." Maya Angelou

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Problem Statement

In recent years, the number of Latino students attending public school in the United States has risen significantly. According to America's Promise Alliance (2016), enrollment of Latino students increased from 13.2% to 23.7% between 1996 and 2016. While the population is increasing, Latino students are also most at-risk of not graduating (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). These national trends are evident across the country and District X is no different.

District X is a large suburban/urban district in the Mid-Atlantic region that serves 129,000 students. As the Latino population grows within the district, educational leaders have become particularly concerned about the graduation rate of the district's Hispanic/Latino male students. As of school year (SY) 2016, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for the Hispanic/Latino subgroup was 66.73% (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2017). This rate is 14.73 percentage points below the county average of 81.41% and indicates that almost 33% of the school district's Latino population is leaving school prior to earning a high school diploma. The graduation rate for Latino males is even lower at 62.04% (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2017).

As the enrollment of Latino male students continues to increase in District X, it is important that the district address the issue of declining graduation rates and the prevailing achievement gap between the aforementioned subgroup, the aggregate and the other identified District X race and gender subgroups. Bradley and Renzulli (2011) explained that the disengagement of students begins early and is most evident as students

transition from middle to high school; and Noguero (2008) found that the disparity between the promotion and retention rates of the aggregate, and of Latino male students specifically, is most significant as they transition from ninth to 10th grade. Data also show that once students are retained, the likelihood that they will dropout increases significantly (Everyone Graduates Center, 2011). Research indicates that the long-term consequences often experienced by Latinos, and Men of Color in general, who drop out of school create a "silent crisis" (Fuller, 2011). Understanding the perceptions of students on the factors that lead to early school leaving can help District X address this crisis and strengthen their efforts to develop or enhance interventions to support Latino male students and help them achieve academic success.

Scope of the Problem

High school dropout rates are an issue for schools and districts across the United States, in part because the impact of a student's decision to leave school before graduation affects both the individuals who must make a living without a secondary education and the larger society that must cover the resulting social costs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Every day, almost 7,000 students drop out of America's high schools (Balfanz & Herzog, 2007). Annually, that number adds up to about 1.2 million students that do not graduate from high school with their peers (Rumberger, 2011).

Research has indicated that students drop out of school for many reasons, including poverty, bullying and harassment, poor attendance, poor grades, kinship care issues, parenting, and the lack of meaningful relationships (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). Hoyle and Collier (2005) also noted that school districts pay a price when students leave, as schools lose both financial and human capital. Because state and

local funding formulas rely on student attendance, every dropout has a negative impact on the resources available to meet student needs.

To promote high school graduation and college and career readiness, President Barack Obama issued a challenge during the February 2009 Joint Session of Congress Address for the US to become the nation with the highest percentage of students graduating from college by 2020. The federal government accompanied this challenge with a mandate that states calculate cohort graduation and dropout rates, instead of annual rates. The resulting reports highlighted the dropout problem in District X for the aggregate, generally, and specifically for the Hispanic/Latino male subgroup.

According to SY 16 data provided in the District X Master Plan (2017), the graduation rate for District X schools failed to meet Maryland's graduation rate standard of 90%. While the districts graduation rate increased from SY 13 to SY 16, and the dropout rate decreased during the same period, (District X) still had the second highest dropout rate in the Maryland Public School System, and during SY 13 to SY 16, Latino male students had even lower graduation rates (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2017). As indicated in Table 1, during SY16, the graduation rate for Latino males was 62.04%, and the dropout rate for this population was 30.31% (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2017). Data indicate that the enrollment of Latino students is on the rise, and if District X fails to develop and implement differentiated efforts and strategies designed to retain Latino students—especially Latino males—the district's enrollment will either become stagnant or begin to decline.

Table 1

Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

Mid-Atlantic State	2014	2015	2016
All	86.39	86.98	87.61
Hispanic/Latino	77.46	76.89	76.55
Hispanic/Latino male	72.66	72.70	71.40
Limited English proficiency	54.06	49.33	47.54

Source: Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education. (2016). *2016 state Report Card*

In District X's (2015) *Strategic Plan*, the District X Executive Cabinet and district leadership acknowledged a disparity between achievement levels of the aggregate and those of Latino male students in numerous areas (i.e., assessment scores, graduation rate, dropout rate, attendance, discipline, and ninth grade promotion rate); and they established a goal of achieving a 90% on-time graduation rate for all students by SY 2020. Through a series of strategy team meetings, executive leadership established a Graduation Task Force, whose purpose involved increasing graduation and ninth grade promotion rates and decreasing dropout rates.

Because of the increase in the population of Latino male students across schools, and the significant gap reflected in 2016 graduation data, the district has made this subgroup a priority. The district has identified a compelling need to develop and expand options for the Latino male students that will help them meet the state's graduation requirements. As reflected in Table 2, the District X aggregate four-year cohort

graduation rate increased slightly (+2.69 percentage points) from 78.75% in SY 14-15 to 81.44% in SY 15-16. Despite this improvement, the district's graduation rate was still below the system's 2015 target, and the graduation rate for the Latino subgroup fell below that of the county, state and national graduation rates (Maryland Report Card, 2016).

Table 2

District X Four-Year Adjusted Graduation Cohort Rate

Student subgroup	Adjusted graduation cohort rate			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
All students	74.12	76.59	78.75	81.44
Asian	87.46	84.37	89.27	91.72
Two or more races	84.00	87.10	91.97	92.57
White	81.02	81.98	78.96	80.36
Black or African American	76.08	78.64	81.28	85.44
Free/Reduced meals (FARMS)	71.54	73.33	77.36	77.49
American Indian or Alaska Native	63.16	87.88	58.62	71.88
Limited English proficient (LEP)	63.03	55.52	53.61	49.60
Hispanic/Latino	60.81	65.59	67.37	66.70
Hispanic/Latino Males	55.56	60.70	61.66	62.04
Special education	54.30	62.31	62.31	67.40
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	58.33	52.63	52.63	67.40

Source: Maryland Report Card (2015)

Changing demographics within the county make concerns about the graduation rate of Latino students in District X more immediate. For example, in SY 02, 76.7% of District X students were African-American. That number dropped to 61.4% in SY 15-16. Conversely, the proportion of Hispanic/Latino students in the school system rose substantially over the past decade, reaching 29.6% in SY 15-16 from 9.5% in SY 05-06 (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2015). As District X's overall Latino population increases, the Latino population in Grades 9-12 also grows. In fact, the district reported an increase of 1,620 Latino high school students between SY 13-14 and SY 15-16. Additionally, approximately 51% of the Latino high school population was male during SY 15 (District X, 2015).

Table 3 shows the three-year (SY 14-16) ninth grade promotion rate for the State Department of Education subgroups. The data indicate that the rate for Hispanic/Latino subgroup fell below that of the district average for each of the three years. Understanding the systemic factors that lead Latino male students to leave school as early as ninth grade is critical if the district is to attain its goal of a 90% on-time graduation rate by SY 20. As such, this study provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore student perceptions about the factors that "push" or 'pull" Latino students out of school before they earn a high school diploma, as well as those that support then and encourage them to stay in school. The sample for this study included respondents from the three high schools in District X with the highest enrollment of Latino students (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 3

District X Ninth-Grade Promotion Rate

District X student subgroup	9th grade promotion rate			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
All students	75.5	79.7	81.4	85.0
Asian	90.8	94.6	95.0	95.0
Two or more races	88.3	86.2	86.3	89.6
White	82.3	82.2	82.5	85.0
Black or African American	75.8	81.2	83.0	86.3
Free/Reduced meals (FARMS)	72.5	76.6	78.6	82.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	76.3	62.5	74.1	85.7
Limited English proficient (LEP)	71.7	70.0	75.2	81.9
Hispanic/Latino	70.9	73.9	76.5	80.9
Special Education	72.4	76.6	77.4	79.5
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	68.4	73.3	90.0	94.4

Source: Maryland Report Card (2016)

Table 4

District X 9-12 Enrollment Figures, 2016

District X student subgroups	Student enrollment		
	2013	2014	2015
All students (Grades 9-12)	35,938	35,174	35,495
Hispanic/Latino (Grades 9-12)	6,626	7,219	8.246
Hispanic/Latino males (Grades 9-12)	3,487	3,789	4,417

Source: Maryland Report Card (2017)

Table 5

School Subgroup Enrollment

	Enrollment		
High school	All	Hispanic/Latino	Hispanic/Latino male
School A	2426	1579	896
School B	1857	1126	586
School C	2262	1333	726

Source: Maryland Report Card (2016)

Literature Review

Researchers have identified a number of factors that work together to push or pull students out of school. These factors include both internal and external reasons that affect a student's decision to leave school. A vast body of research has established numerous individual predictors of school non-completion that are reflected in the theoretical framework of this study. This review explored the literature on the reasons that Latino students drop out of school, with a focus on the most significant academic factors that affect Latino male students' ninth grade failure and school non-completion: ninth grade transition, academic disengagement, course failure, poor attendance, and disciplinary infractions.

Rising dropout rates for Latino students. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the high school dropout problem is a crisis that affects the entire country; in part because, in addition to its impact on individuals and their education, it leads to dramatic economic and social costs. Rumberger (2011) stated that, annually,

about 1.2 million students will not graduate from high school with their peers. According to Fry (2003), the population of Latino students who leave school before graduation was significantly "more male" than were the populations of White and African-American dropouts. Similarly, Fuller (2011) found that in 2008, almost 20% of Latino males dropped out of high school, the highest among any demographic in the country. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), almost 20% of Latino male students dropped out of high school in SY 15, the highest of any demographic group in the country.

A number of researchers have examined differences in both the dropout rates and the reasons for dropping out between racial, ethnic, and gender subgroups. Bradley and Renzulli (2011) found that Latino males were 10 times more likely to leave school than were White males, and were five times as likely to drop out than were Black males. Additionally, the researchers stated that gender and race/ethnicity did not act in the same way for White and Black students in predicting the likelihood of dropping out of school or school non-completion (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). The authors identified a number of reasons that students leave school before graduation, including work, family pressures, economics, pregnancy, and gang involvement. Push out reasons include: course failure, language barriers, disciplinary practices, retention, and feeling disconnected (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011).

Concerns about the dropout rates of Latino males, specifically, are also intensified by economic, demographic, and educational trends that could exacerbate this problem moving forward. As the U.S. Department of Education stated in 2013, one in four African American and nearly one in five Hispanic students still attend high schools where

graduating is not the norm. These alarming statistics further support the pressing need for the discussion across stakeholder groups on strategies that will help keep students in school.

Contreras (2002) also made a compelling assertion that as the America's economy shifts, it is imperative that students earn a high school diploma and go on to pursue a postsecondary education. Research has indicated that educational outcomes like high school graduation and college attendance are critically important factors in promoting economic and social equality, particularly for immigrant, Latino, and other groups with gaps in educational and economic attainment (Carnevale, 1999; Greene, 2002). Additionally, Amos (2009) stated that problems like lower earnings and higher incarceration rates affect young adult dropouts more disproportionately than it affects their better-educated peers. Studies have also shown that school non-completion can lead to substance abuse, use of social services, and a plethora of other social challenges that put a fiscal burden on the country (Noguera, 2008). In fact, CompuServe (2004) found that a one percent increase in high school graduation rates would save approximately $1.4 billion in incarceration costs, or about $2,100 per each male high school graduate. In a later study, Levin, Kilpatrick, and Belfield (2006) concluded that reducing the dropout rate by half would yield the U.S. $45 billion annually in new federal tax revenues or cost savings.

In a 2010 survey of 11th grade students from 10 District X high schools, respondents revealed that students' reasons for dropping out of school mirrored the internal and external factors identified throughout the literature review. Specifically, student respondents spoke to a lack of cultural understanding among teachers and peers,

poor academic performance, feelings of disconnectedness, and low expectations. The literature consistently states that predictive indicators related to key variables like attendance, behavior, course failure, and assessment scores can be useful in predicting student success and graduation from high school. Resolving the Latino male graduation rate crisis in District X is warranted; and to accomplish this aim, the district may need to customize supports for Latino males and other subgroups affected by pervasive gaps in graduation, promotion, and assessment rates. These efforts will potentially lead to a district where students matriculate on track and graduate on time.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the national high school graduation rate reached an all-time high of 82.3% in 2016. This figure indicates that approximately four out of five students graduated with a regular high school diploma within four years. This marked the fifth straight record setting year. While there is much to celebrate, in 2013 through 2015, about one in five students (20%) did not graduate high school with their peers; and one in four African American students, and nearly one in five Hispanic students, attended high schools where graduating was not the norm (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) reflecting significant gaps in subgroup performance. The Latino graduation rate has made recent gains nationally; however, data showed that the percentage of Latinos obtaining a high school diploma is still below the national average (Education Week, 2012).

As mentioned previously, Latino male student's decision to leave school has a significant impact on national, state, and local school completion rates and the job market. The Pew Research Center (2016) posited that the increase in the nation's graduation rate was due, in large part, to the fact that the Latino dropout rate dropped

from 32% in 2000 to 12% in 2014. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), Latinos are expected to comprise 74% of the growth in the nation's labor force by 2024. Researchers further stated that occupations requiring increased preparation and bachelor's degrees or higher are expected to grow by 8.8% during this same time period, leaving fewer opportunities for unskilled or under-skilled workers (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Diploma Counts (2016) concluded that the nation's graduation rate had been on a consistent upward trajectory for the past three years (i.e., 2014, 2015, and 2016) based on the United States Department of Education's Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). The trajectory of the ACGR from 2013-2015, for both the state and District X, was consistent with this trend. While the increases are laudable, the gaps in on-time graduation and school completion rates between subgroups still exist. Additionally, high schools with low graduation rates and gaps in subgroup performance are a key focus of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; America's Promise Alliance, 2016). Both of the aforementioned key themes identified in the ESSA pose a significant roadblock to the national goal of achieving a 90% graduation rate for all students by 2020. America's Promise Alliance (2016) noted that students can play an integral role in addressing the dropout crisis, because no one knows this issue as intimately as the young people.

These findings have significant relevance as the district develops and implements strategies and programs to narrow the gap between the dropout and graduation and promotion rates of the aggregate and the Latino male subgroup. Examining the out-of-school factors and in-school factors, expectations, and beliefs can potentially impact the school completion rates of this vulnerable population.

Factors that contribute to dropout decisions for Latino students. Researchers have identified a number of factors that increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of school. Conchas (1999), for example, suggested that teachers' low expectations and lack of cultural awareness, a curriculum that does not reflect the life experiences of minority youth, and the lack of institutional support systems were all factors that contributed to low academic performance among minority student populations. Bridgeland et al. (2006) conducted focus groups and interviews with ethnically and racially diverse students aged 16-25 who had dropped out of public high schools. Most of the respondents listed school-related reason for dropping out, including missing too many school days, thinking it would be easier to get a GED, getting poor grades, and not liking school.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) reported that in SY 2006-7, approximately 250,000 male students (12% of all ninth-grade boys) and 178,000 female students (nine percent of the girls) repeated ninth grade. The data indicated that approximately 72,000 more boys than girls repeated ninth grade that year. Additionally, Roderick (2006) discovered that there was a subgroup of dropouts that left school between seventh and ninth grades. She called these students early dropouts. Early dropouts could be predicted by low grades all the way back in elementary school.

Roderick and Kelley-Kemple (2014) also found that there were myriad factors that contributed to school non-completion. Their research revealed that the transition to high school, grades, attendance, and lack of engagement in school are all high yield indicators that predict a student's likelihood of dropping out of school. They further stated that if students could make the transition to high school effectively, they would be

more likely to progress in subsequent grades and ultimately graduate from high school on time (Roderick & Kelley-Kemple, 2014).

Academic factors that influence dropout rates. Both researchers and educators often view the high dropout rate among Latino students as a product of poor motivation or an inability to complete the challenging high school curriculum. Instead of exploring the risk factors that keep them from succeeding in school, and finding viable solutions, the tendency is to attribute the phenomenon to a deficit on the part of the student. According to Harper (2012), educators often perceive that Black and Latino males have inherited from their families and communities a staunch carelessness for learning and educational attainment. These perceptions can lead to the assumption that school completion is rarely the goal for these students; and that instead, they are only interested in guns, gangs, fast money, and one of two career options—becoming a rapper or a professional athlete (Harper, 2012).

Richardson (1989) explained that labeling minority children as "deprived" or "at risk" often carries with it the possibility of greater damage to the child than the events or circumstances that originally brought about the designation. Noguero and Hurtado (2011) maintained that Latino men in particular are routinely imagined, researched, and misrepresented in ways that are dehumanizing and monolithic. These perceptions often lead school teachers and administrators to marginalize Latino males' and adopt low expectations for the students, their abilities, and potential. Noguero (2008) also maintained that schools expect Latino students to be disengaged, disrespectful, unprepared, underperforming, violent, and are not surprised that these students are most likely to drop out of high school and least likely to enroll in college.

As Rumberger (2011) stated, the goal must be to change the narrative about Latino male students from the perception that they will not complete school because of a lack of motivation or family and socioeconomic challenges to a belief that educators can address the push, pull, and supportive pull factors to keep students in school. Understanding and addressing the aforementioned factors can support efforts to increase the number of students that complete high school, pursue postsecondary opportunities, and positively contribute to the nation's workforce and economy.

Attendance. Another strong contributor to school dropout is poor attendance, which Balfanz, Herzog, and McIver (2007) identified as one of the predictive indicators that students may not graduate from high school. Specifically, the authors found that attending school less than 90% of time in sixth grade increases the chance that students will not graduate (Balfanz et al., 2007). Byrnes and Reyna (2012) found chronic absenteeism to be among the strongest predictors of dropping out of high school—stronger even than suspensions, test scores, and being over age for one's grade level—after having controlled for student demographics and backgrounds. Similarly, Allensworth and Easton (2007) found, through an analysis of data from Chicago Public Schools that school attendance was by far the strongest predictor of course performance. Likewise, the Georgia State Department of Education (Atiles, Bohon, & Macpherson, 2005) found a strong relationship between attendance in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grades and graduation rates, controlling for student demographics. Specifically, the researchers associated going from missing up to 5 days to missing 6 to 10 days with a 7 to 10 percentage-point drop in graduation rates (Atiles et al., 2005).

Implementing policies and procedures to monitor Latino male students' daily attendance can potentially support ninth grade completion and increase student engagement and graduation rates. Schools and the district must identify strategies, programs, and personnel that will help them address the attendance issue, which has become increasingly important as the compulsory attendance age is increasing due to a new State Senate Bill.

Discipline. Research indicates that students who experience disciplinary action are more likely to drop out of school before graduation than students that are not suspended or expelled. In a study of students in the City of Philadelphia, Balfanz and MacIver (2007) found that 6% of respondents received one or more suspensions in sixth grade, and only 20% of the suspended students graduated within one year of on-time graduation. Bradley and Renzulli (2011) examined class- and race-specific differences in the factors that lead students to drop out of school. They found that in every racial/ethnic group, including Latino students, minority males were more likely than females or their White counterparts to leave school due to suspension or expulsion.

Stearns and Glennie (2006) found that schools push minority students out when they utilize policies and practices like mandatory expulsion and zero tolerance mandates, and Skiba et al. (2011) revealed that students from African-American and Latino families were more likely than their White peers to receive expulsion or out-of-school suspension as consequences for the same or similar behavior. Further, Ponjuan (2011) also reported that 49.5% of Black and 29.6% of Latino male students in grades 6-12 had been suspended from school, compared to 21.3% of their White male peers. These results argue for direct efforts in policy, practice, and research to address the disparities in school

discipline and for further examinations into the relationship between disciplinary action and student engagement in school.

Academic performance/course failure. While researchers have had much to see about the reasons that students drop out of schools, discussions about the factors that influence students to leave school often fail to acknowledge the one factor that is most directly related to graduation—students' performance in their courses. In fact, poor academic performance is one of the most consistent predictors of dropout, whether measured through grades, test scores, or class failures (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). The Chicago Consortium on School Research combined two highly predictive ninth grade risk factors to create an "on-track indicator' for high school freshmen. Based upon this model, a student is considered to be on track at the end of ninth grade if he or she has accumulated enough course credits to earn promotion to 10th grade while receiving no more than one F (based on semester marks) in core academic subjects.

Allensworth and Easton (2007) noted that inadequate credit accumulation in a student's freshman year, which usually results from course failures, is highly predictive of failing to graduate four years later. Numerous other studies (e.g., Balfanz & Herzog, 2007; Noguera, 2008) have also noted failure in core academic courses as a predictor of dropping out of school. Allensworth and Easton (2007) stated that boys, students with highly mobile students, and students entering the ninth grade older than age 14 are more likely to fail courses than other students. The "on-track" predictor is 85% successful in determining which members of the freshman class will not graduate on time and nearly as good at predicting who will not graduate within five years (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). They also found that grades tended to be better predictors of dropout than test scores.

Finally, it is important to note that for most students, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act but a gradual process of disengagement, with early warning signs that can be clearly identified at least one to three years before students drop out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). These warning signs include poor attendance, low grades, discipline and behavioral problems. Students also demonstrate this disengagement through a lack of involvement in class and in school activities, pregnancy, retention and the eight to ninth grade transition.

Allensworth and Easton (2007) showed that freshmen with weak academics entering high school, and who reported a positive ninth grade academic experience graduated at nearly twice the rate of incoming freshmen with strong academics who reported a negative ninth grade academic experience. These findings demonstrated just how critical school-level factors are in determining who stays in school and who does not. They further demonstrated the importance of ninth grade to students' successful matriculation to grade ten and, ultimately, high school completion.

Negative stereotypes and deficit thinking. Several studies have suggested that, far too often, students, teachers, and school leaders adopt a deficit thinking model when contemplating high dropout rates among Latino male student populations. According to Valencia (1997), deficit thinking is a pseudo-science founded on racial and class bias. The author further stated that the notion that low-income and minority students fail because of limited intelligence, lack of motivation, and inadequate home socialization is flawed, particularly when looking at achievement gaps (Valencia, 1997). Similarly, Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth, and Thomas (1999) posited that when facing issues of academic achievement and performance, school administrators and staff often assume

that something is inherently wrong with the student. These assumptions often originate from the fact that the students possesses demographic, socioeconomic, or behavioral characteristics that put them at risk for early school leaving (Aviles et al., 1999).

What's more, research suggested that Latino students drop out of school for a variety of reasons associated with immigration, including the need to work to care for family both in the U.S. and abroad (Harris & Lee 2006; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004). According to Fry and Passel (2009), about 35% of the foreign born Latino adolescents in the U.S. are more likely to support or help to support their family compared 21% among their U.S.-born counterparts. According to Stearns and Glennie (2006), a student who chooses to stop attending school because of pressures to contribute to the family's household income needs has been "pulled out" of school.

Valdivieso and Nicolau (1994) suggested that Latino youth often must take on adult roles and responsibilities earlier than members of other ethnic groups. Further, Lee and Staff (2007) stated that Latino male students face more economic pressures than do their female counterparts to work and send money home to their country of origin and/or support their family in America. As a result, when Latino males enter the U.S. school system, they are more likely to leave school due to familial pressure to contribute to the household financially. Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1996) suggested that becoming a parent during high school is another reason why a student can be pulled-out of school. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that there were nearly 800,000 gang members in the U.S., most of whom were between the ages of 14 and 27-years-old. The significance of gang participation is a major concern for Latino youth because they represent 46% of the estimated 800,000 gang members in the U.S. (US Gang Research

Center, 2011). Conchas and Vigil (2012) asserted that gang involvement could be a strong preventer of school completion and college and career readiness. Latino male youth view the financial resources of gangs and the status of being somebody as a plus versus a destructive path (Arfaniarromo, 2001). It is clear that negative stereotypes of the Latino population and deficit thinking, amongst other variables aforementioned, have a direct influence on academic factors that contribute to drop-out.

Push and pull factors. Jordan et al. (1994) categorized the factors that increase the chances that a student will drop out into two grouping—"push" and "pull" factors, which are influences that either push students toward dropping out of school or pull students out of school, thus resulting in school dropout. Bradley and Renzulli (20110 defined the term "push factor" as something that occurs in the school that has a negative influence on students' social, personal, and/or academic success and "pushes" students to leave school. Push factors negatively affect students' school non-completion factors such as language barriers, feeling disconnected, low grades, course failure, attrition, absenteeism, disciplinary policies and practices, and academic disengagement (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Specifically, students can be pushed out of school for adverse situations within the learning environment.

Conversely, Rumberger (2011) discovered that students could also be "pulled out" of school when distracted by factors external to the school (e.g., family, community, and peers). Several researchers have furthered this concept, including Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013) and Rumberger, (2011), who provided a framework for understanding the reasons students drop out of school. Pull factors included out-of-school enticements like

jobs and family**.** These pull factors may include family pressures, economic, teen pregnancy, gang involvement, and employment (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011).

Supportive pull factors. While data have revealed a number of elements that prevent students from completing school, researchers have also found that certain supportive factors can pull students back from the brink of dropping out and help them persist to graduation. Identifying and implementing programs and strategies that focus on the supportive pull influences can support efforts to improve school completion rates for Latino male students. Unlike the aforementioned traditional pull factors, supportive pull factors are found both inside and outside of the school building "pull" students toward high school completion. These factors include, but are not limited to, grit, persistence, family values, relationships, and sense of belonging (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). While there are many push and pull factors that negatively affect Latino male students and contribute to their being pushed or pulled out of school, supportive pull factors pull students into the school environment. These supports lead to increases in the number of Latino male students who graduate from high school.

Allensworth and Easton (2007) suggested that grades were higher and failure and absence rates were lower in schools characterized by two features: supportive relationships between teachers and students, and a perception among students that the work they were doing in high school was preparing them for the future. Further, according to Bradley and Renzulli (2011), Rumberger, (2011), and Harper and Williams (2014), certain school and community factors—positive teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, high expectations, family and community influences, family

expectations, persistence, mentoring, and educational aspirations—are critical to the improved ninth grade success of Latino male students.

According to Behnke, Gonzalez, and Cox (2010), while a number of studies have provided valuable insight into the factors that lead students to remain in or drop out of school, very few studies have explored Latino students' opinions of the services and supports that help them stay in school (e.g., family, school, peers, and policies). They further explain that such supportive pull factors encourage students' engagement in school and foster their excitement about learning, often despite the challenges that they face in their homes and communities. Understanding students' perspectives about the factors that inspire and motivate them to succeed can contribute to the current discourse within the district about the best ways to support this subgroup.

Prior attempts to address the problem. Over the past decade, educational leaders at the national, district, and local levels have developed a number of initiatives to address lagging school completion rates. To date, these efforts have targeted broad populations of students and rarely focus on specific subgroups like Latino males.

National efforts. According to the United States Census Bureau (2013), the Hispanic/Latino population is the largest, youngest, and fastest growing minority group and will account for 70% of the nation's population growth between 2015 and 2060. The Census Bureau estimated that by 2050, the Latino workers will constitute one fourth of the national workforce in the US. As the Latino population increases across the country, school systems are identifying dropout intervention programs that will help to improve Latino student achievement and narrow the graduation and ninth grade promotion gaps.

A review of national data sources revealed efforts in large urban school districts across the nation to address the issue of Latino male school completion. Allensworth, 2014; Harper and Williams, 2014; Noguero and Hurtado, 2012 identified strategies and programs in New York and Chicago Public Schools that were addressing the performance and graduation gap between Latino male students and that of their peers. Currently, there is not an extensive menu of best practices for these dropout prevention efforts. However, there are a few components of dropout prevention programs that have proven successful, such as (a) attendance and behavior monitors, (b) tutoring and counseling, (c) establishment of small learning communities for greater personalization, and (d) engaging catch-up courses (Harper & Williams, 2014).

Although there is a scarcity of data on proven programs that specifically affect the ninth grade promotion and graduation rates of Latino male students, Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007) indicated that several programs implemented in large urban school districts have shown promising results with Latino male students' school engagement. These programs include (a) the on track indicator system in Chicago Public Schools, (b) Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS), (c) career academies, (d) eighth to ninth grade transition programs, and (e) Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID).

The early warning/on track indicator system. Researchers have conducted a plethora of research to predict the relationship between students' background and their propensity to drop out of school. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), for example, examined the topic and concluded that a middle or high school student's decision not to attend school regularly, to misbehave, or to expend low effort are all consequential

behavioral indicators of a student's growing disengagement from school and are indicators of an increasing risk that he or she may drop out of school altogether. On-track indicators are widely used in large school systems like Chicago and Philadelphia. Jerald (2006) contended that these indicators could predict 85% of eventual dropouts by the end of their ninth grade year. Roderick and Kelley-Kemple (2014) showed that on-track rates improved for all groups of Chicago Public Schools because of the early identification of at-risk variables. The on-track rates of Latino male students, specifically, increased from 52.1% in 2012 to 77.4% in 2013, reflecting an increase of 25.3 percentage points (Roderick & Kelley-Kemple (2014).

Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) suggested that four predictive indicators that reflected poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failure in sixth grade aided in identifying 60% of students who would not graduate from high school. Following students in Philadelphia schools over a seven-year period, the researchers found that the aforementioned indicators could, in fact, predict future dropouts. They also found that attending school less than 90% of the time increased the chance that students would not graduate, and that course failure was a better predictor of not graduating than were lower test scores. Findings from the use of early on-track indicators led to the design of prevention and intervention programs in Philadelphia schools (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS). The ninth grade is often considered a critical "make it or break it" year, when students get on or off track to succeed in high school. Herlihy (2007) found that more students fail ninth grade than any other high school grade, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out. Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success

(ALAS), a dropout prevention program, is one collaborative approach involving the student, family, school, and community. ALAS strategies included problem-solving training, counseling, attendance monitoring, parent training and education, and use of community resources (What Works Clearinghouse, 2014). Evaluation results revealed that dropout rates for students involved in the ALAS program (2.2%) were lower than those of a similar control group (16.7%; What Works Clearinghouse, 2013).

Career academies. According to Conchas (2006), career academy models were designed to reduce dropout rates. Stern, Raby, and Dayton (2010) stated that career academies were a useful intervention for retaining potential dropouts and noted that they prepare students for postsecondary education. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (2008) suggested that career academies had a significant impact on students in Chicago Public High Schools. Their exploratory study revealed that the academies increased the likelihood that participants who entered the program with a high risk of dropping out would stay in school through the end of the twelfth grade. For students with a medium-to-low risk of dropping out, the academies increased career and technical course-taking and participation in career development activities. The California Partnership Academies (2003) stated that, on average, career academies reduced the rate of school dropouts and increased attendance rates, credits earned, grade point averages, and graduation rates. Data showed that college attendance and completion rates also increased for participating students (California Partnership Academies, 2003).

Transition programs. To explore possible solutions to pervasive dropout rates, Johnson, Simon, and Mun (2014) investigated the implementation of the Peer Group Connection transition program in a low-income Mid-Atlantic high school. The

researchers sought to determine the program's impact on the high school graduation rate. Twelfth grade peer leaders worked with ninth grade participants, 92% of whom were Hispanic/Latino, to create a supportive environment. Johnson et al. found that Latino male students who participated in the program during the ninth grade were significantly more likely to graduate from high school within four years. Male students who participated in the program had a graduation rate of 81 percent.

*AVID***.** AVID is a precollege preparation program for lower income, ethnic-minority, and first generation students. The program uses proven practices to prepare students for success in high school, college, and a career. An evaluation of the program in the Austin Independent School District found that students felt a sense of belonging, were more likely to be in school on a daily basis, and demonstrated levels of academic performance that exceeded that of their classmates who were not in the program (Oswald, 2002). Of the 35,115 high school graduates in the AVID Class of 2014, 57% were Hispanic/Latino (AVID Center, 2014). Further, in 2014, AVID seniors outpaced the national average of completing high school and enrolling in either a two or four-year college the first fall term after high school (AVID Center, 2014).

The aforementioned urban systems have identified potential solutions, but the extent to which they are applicable to District X is unknown. The next section explored District X's efforts to address the issue of ninth grade Latino male's school engagement.

District efforts. District X has experienced significant demographic shifts in the past two decades. The Latino population in particular has more than doubled between 2001 and 2010 (SchoolMax Enrollment Module, 2015). According to the 2014 report from the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 16.9% of District X residents are Latino.

Although Latinos reside predominantly in the northern part of the county, most recently, growing numbers have also begun to enroll in schools in the southern areas of the county. The percentage of Latino males in grades nine through 12 increased by 20% during this same time period.

While the district has made some progress, a significant gap persists between the academic performance of the aggregate and African-American and Latino male subgroups. Latino males, in particular, still struggle to complete the graduation requirements established by State Department of Education. In response to this issue, the district has established three approaches to address the ninth grade promotion problem: (a) blended learning, (b) transition support, and (c) the early warning indicator report.

Table 6 shows the discrepancies in ninth grade promotion between the state, District X, and Latino male students. The ninth grade success of this subgroup is critical to improving their graduation rates and pathways to postsecondary opportunities.

Table 6

Three-Year Trend Data (Ninth Grade Promotion Rate)

	Ninth grade promotion rate		
Year	Mid-Atlantic State	District X	District X Latino male students
2014	87.5	79.7	73.9
2015	88.4	81.4	76.5
2016	89.3	85.0	80.9

Source: Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education (2017)

Both the State Department of Education's *Dropout Prevention Guide* and District X's *Bridge to Excellence Master Plan* (2015) detailed district initiatives designed to address ninth grade low promotion and graduation rates. The U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (2013) also identified key components of research-based interventions that support dropout prevention. While several of the local initiatives aligned with the recommendation of the What Works Clearinghouse, only one addressed the differentiated needs of Latino students, and none addressed the unique needs of Latino males. At the time of this study, district efforts to address the graduation, ninth grade promotion, and dropout rates gap problem included (a) community programs, (b) blended learning, (c) technology intervention, (d) transition programs, (e) multiple pathways to success, (f) career academies, (g) student withdrawal assistance team, and (h) the Early Warning Indicator Report.

Community programs. In response to the growing Latino population, the District X CEO and Board of Education created the Office of Diversity to focus on Latino affairs. The core work of the Office focuses on supporting systemic issues of equity and access, promoting increased graduation rates, ensuring that District X's workforce reflects its student population across all workgroups, and increasing the outreach to Spanish-speaking families and community. The district has also established the Education That is Multicultural and Achievement (ETMA) initiative and various task forces to address issues of culturally responsive teaching, poor graduation rates, disciplinary practices, and family engagement among this growing subgroup.

Blended learning. Horn and Stoker (2013) defined blended learning as a formal education program in which (a) a student learns at least in part through online instruction,

with some element of student control over time, (b) student learning follows an individualized path and/or pace and, at least in part, takes place in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home, and (c) the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. District X offers blended/online learning as an option for credit recovery to support students who underperform academically, display emotional or behavioral issues, exhibit a high risk of potential suspension or expulsion, demonstrate a high risk of dropping out of school, or display a need for individualized instruction.

Technology interventions. Research has shown that students benefit when they receive instruction through a variety of learning modalities that align with their strengths and learning goals (America's Promise Alliance, 2014). The effective use of technology for "anytime, anywhere learning" has proven particularly effective with Latino male high school students (Carnegie Corporation, 2015). While blended learning has aided in increasing the matriculation rates to the tenth grade for SY 14-15 and SY 15-16 for the aggregate and other subgroups, increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the system's dropout rate, many Latino male students are unable to participate because of the language barrier and their lack of access to technology.

Transition programs. During SY13-14, District X implemented a full-day systemic orientation for all incoming middle and high school students as a part of the district's transition plan. The district's five-phase transition plan provides activities and progress monitoring for sixth, seventh, and ninth graders throughout their transition year. In addition, every county high school now has a Ninth Grade Academy Team. These teams closely monitor the achievement of ninth graders and offer early interventions

before students have to repeat the ninth grade, which will greatly increase their risk dropping out of high school. Career Academy and Ninth Grade Academy teams use the Early Warning Indicator Report (EWIR) to focus on students that need additional assistance and provide appropriate supports to help these students successfully navigate what can be a difficult time in their academic careers.

Multiple pathways to success. During SY 13-14, District X developed Multiple Pathways to Success to provide options to students and support district goals of increasing graduation rates and decreasing dropout rates. The initiative has three goals: keeping students on track, getting students back on track, and accelerating their track by offering four personalized learning opportunities. The four pathways include Compass Learning, Apex Learning, and quarter recovery (see Figure 1).

SY2015-16 Multiple Pathways to Success	
Compass Learning Credit Recovery	**Apex Learning** Original Credit
Quarter Recovery Quarters I-III Via Compass Learning	**Quarter Recovery** Quarters I-III Via Learning Modules

Figure 1. Multiple Pathways to Success SY 2015-2016

These programs have proven successful supporting the district's increase in both graduation and ninth grade promotion rates. Over 5,000 students across the district's comprehensive and alternative high schools have taken advantage of the opportunity to stay with their state-identified graduation cohorts. While the programs have been effective in increasing student engagement and on-time matriculation to the next course and grade, there are several obstacles that impede the enrollment and success of many of

the district's Latino male students, including fiscal challenges, time, language barriers, and family responsibilities that often preclude their participation. Most schools offer the program before or after school and on Saturdays. The timing of these sessions can present an obstacle for many Latino male students due to transportation, work obligations, and family commitments. Additionally, there is limited funding for the programs from the district due to budget constraints. The school-based programs are self-sustaining, so schools charge students a nominal fee.

Career academies. Beginning in SY 2011-12, the District X high school redesign program expanded opportunities for students to participate in the district's successful programs, while also providing new opportunities directly related to growing industries. District X began the implementation of an "academy" structure that allowed students to self-select a course of study based on their interests, while simultaneously engaging students in rigorous academic coursework. For SY 2015-16, all 22 District X high schools offered at least one career academy, and many high schools offered two or more academy options. When fully implemented, the school system will offer 12 career academies, all of which will be placed in each of five regional geographic high school clusters. Through the career academies, students will be able to select from among 42 distinct career pathways (or courses of study). Professional school counselors meet with eighth graders and their parents to determine the best course of study. Additionally, school staff use career assessment tools to aid students in identifying career paths and interests.

According to survey data from the district's Office of College and Career Readiness, the enrollment and advisement for Latino students, specifically male students,

is still a concern for district leaders, school-based coordinators, and administrators. Language barriers, academy offerings, and the lack of middle school advisement by professional school counselors frequently prohibit Latino male students, and their parents, from understanding the program options. Additionally, data show that High schools that offer trade programs, such as masonry, construction, and automotive programs, tend to have larger number of Latino male students.

Other challenges to participation include the collection of data on student demographics by program, the fact that some programs are available at only one school per geographic region, and the lack of available support once students enroll in the academy programs. To address these concerns, in SY 2016-17, the district began flagging academy students in SchoolMax ™, which allows for the collection of data by school, academy, and pathway. Collected data include information on demographics, assessment, engagement, and scheduling (District X, 2015). Additionally, coordinators are assigned to a cohort of students to monitor their progress on a quarterly basis using the indicators in the EWIR report.

Student withdrawal assistance team (SWAT). To meet its goal of graduating 90% of its students within four years, along with district SMART goals, District X must work collaboratively to develop and implement processes for effectively managing the withdrawal of students. SMART goals for SY16 included (a) decreasing the ninth grade retention rate by 3%-5%and (b) increasing the graduation rate by 3%-5% (District X, 2016). To this end, the district has established a student withdrawal assistance team, whose primary goal is to increase the number of students change in school placement and decrease the number of withdrawals noted as whereabouts unknown.

Students withdrawn through a "W" code are coded as dropouts based on state regulations; however, the use of the "W" code has negatively affected the district's data. Many students coded as a withdrawal actually transferred to another school district, state, or country. Implementing policies that mitigate record keeping concerns and identify students as transfers versus withdrawals will have a significant impact on district data. Additionally, the Latino populations in the three high schools in this study have the largest number of the following withdrawal codes: W-50s (whereabouts unknown), W-33s (lack of interest) and W-34s (pregnancy) as defined by the State Student Records Manual (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2015).

While the district has indicated that the aforementioned initiatives have proven effective in increasing graduation and ninth grade promotion rates and decreasing the dropout rate, rates of ninth grade disengagement, promotion, graduation, and dropout for Latino males is below that of other subgroups. Currently, there is limited disaggregated data available that evaluates the extent of the impact of each program on Latino male student achievement.

Early warning system. During SY2013-14, District X implemented an enhanced Early Warning Indicator Report (EWIR). The EWIR tool provides information in three band areas (i.e., red, yellow, and green) to show the predictive variables related to the promotion probability of seventh, eight, and ninth graders. These indicators include (a) grade point average, (b) math and reading assessment scores, (c) attendance rate, (d) SRI Reading Lexile score, and (e) the number of suspensions/expulsions. The EWIR model uses these indicators to predict whether a student is at low risk (green), moderate risk (yellow), or high risk (red) of passing ninth grade. This system enables middle and high

school staff to provide targeted and intensive academic and behavioral support and interventions to assist with academic and social engagement.

To date, District X has only made limited use of the EWIR to address the performance of Latino students, specifically, but has established no differentiation of supports and interventions for Latino male students. While District X provides statistics related to subgroup graduation, dropout, and ninth grade promotion rates, it has given insufficient focus to understanding the underlying factors that perpetuate the disparities between the rates of the aggregate and those of Latino male students.

Purpose of the Study

Through this study, the researcher explored ninth grade Latino male students' perspectives on factors that contribute to ninth grade promotion success. This information allowed the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that facilitate and impede District X students' success and influence their decisions to remain in school or leave before graduation. Specifically, the study targeted the three high schools in the county with the largest Latino male enrollment percentages and the most significant gaps in graduation and ninth grade promotion rates between the aggregate and the Latino male subgroup. Exploring the perceptions of Latino male students, identified as on-track and those of students identified as at-risk for non-completion of ninth grade, about the factors that affect their academic success can help the district identify strategies and programs to increase the school completion rates of this subgroup. Additionally, focusing on the engagement and school completion of Latino male ninth grade students can support the district's goals of increasing graduation rates and decreasing ninth grade retention and

drop-out rates, and ideally, will help to narrow the achievement gap between the aggregate and the aforementioned subgroup.

Gaining a clearer understanding of students' perspectives on the institutional factors that contribute to or hinder their ninth grade success can aid school and district leaders as they develop programs and policies to improve rates of school completion among Latino male students. Additionally, understanding students' perspectives on the supportive factors that encourage their promotion and graduation can help to increase expectations and can shed light on the curriculum, cultural awareness training and professional development enhancements needed to provide more beneficial services for Latino males students.

Why Focus on Ninth Grade?

This study focused specifically on Latino male students in ninth grade for several reasons: (a) ninth graders are most at risk during their transition from middle to high school; (b) data indicate preponderance of course failure in ninth grade; and (c) academic disengagement begins in ninth grade and often results in attendance and discipline problems. Research indicates that more students fail Grade 9 than any other grade (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007) and promotion rates between Grade 9 and 10 are lower than that of any other grade (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). This phenomenon, known as the ninth grade bulge, and the rate at which students disappear between Grade 9 and 10 has tripled over the last 30 years, contributing to the 10th grade dip (Haney et al., 2004).

Schools often make little effort to welcome new students to high school and to help them acclimate to their new surroundings. For Latino students, the transition from middle school to high school can be a traumatic passage from the smaller, nurturing,

team-oriented environment of middle school to the large maze of the departmentalized high school (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Far too often, schools provide insufficient support to assist ninth graders with this difficult transition.

Lan and Lanthier (2003) cited the need for additional research on the transition period from middle school to high school and its complexities to provide insight into the needs of students at risk of dropping out of high school. The factors that contribute to the gap in Hispanic/Latino graduation rates often starts in ninth grade, as students make the transition from middle to high school (Conchas, 2006). Lys (2009) asserted that middle schools were poised to help Latino students prepare for a smoother adjustment to academic life in high school and reinforce the enthusiasm with which they anticipate the transition. Lys also found that eighth grade Latino students, particularly females, were eager to transition to high school, but they wary of perceived challenges related to the school's social and cultural complexities.

Research has also found an association between the stress that students often experience during the transition from middle school to high school and lowered achievement and school attendance (Galassi, 2004; Moselle & Irvin, 2000). Allensworth and Easton (2007), however, revealed that freshmen with weak academics entering high school who reported a positive ninth grade academic experience graduated at nearly twice the rate of incoming freshmen with strong academics who reported a negative ninth grade academic experience. These findings reveal just how critical school-level factors are in determining who stays in school and who does not.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are the operational definitions used for key terms throughout this study:

Four-year adjusted graduation rate. The four-year adjusted graduation rate equals the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b) (1) (i)-(iv).

Early Warning Indicator Report (EWIR). This document uses five variables (i.e., five variables (Grade Point Average, attendance, suspensions and math and reading assessment scores) to provide information on first-time 9th graders' risk of retention by labeling them with three color-coded bands: (a) red – high risk (<70% chance of being promoted), (b) yellow – moderate risk (70%-95%), and (c) green – low risk (>95%; District X, 2016).

Hispanic or Latino. This group includes individuals of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race [Note: The term, "Spanish origin," can be used to describe this population, in addition to "Hispanic" or "Latino."] (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2016).

Promotion rate. This figure reflects the percentage of students that advanced from one grade to a higher level from one school year to the next and is calculated by dividing the aggregate number of students promoted by the aggregate number of students enrolled as of the end of the school year [Note: Summer promotions are included in the promotion rate percentage.] (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education, 2016).

Newcomers. District X classifies *newcomers* as students who have studied in a foreign school system (not including Department of Defense schools). The international newcomer population is very diverse in the district and typically includes students from 148 countries who speak 140 languages. Newcomers often enroll in District X schools from systems that have different beginning and ending dates for their school year, lengths of required years of attendance, teaching approaches, curriculum content, grade systems and quality of instruction. Some students come with interrupted education due to political situations. The International Student Counseling Office (ISCO) reviews and evaluates students' educational history for grade placement and awarding of high school credits upon enrollment in the district (District X, 2017).

Ninth grade success. A student achieves ninth grade success when they earn at least five full-year course credits, pass core courses, earn a cumulative 1.0 or higher grade-point average, and accrue less than 11 days of unexcused absences and less than four misbehavior referrals during the first year of high school (Atlantic Monthly, 2013).

Low-graduation-rate high schools. High schools from which no more than 67% of students graduate within four years are considered low-graduation-rate high schools. These schools tend to enroll larger populations of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income students. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) requires states to use evidence-based approaches to improve the graduation rates of high schools that enroll 100 or more students and have an Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 67% or less (DePauoli, Balfanz, & Bridgeland, 2016). Nationally, of the roughly 924,000 students in large, low-graduation-rate high schools (with 300 or more students), 65% were from low-

income families, and 63% were African-American or Hispanic/Latino (America's Promise Alliance, 2016).

Justification of the Investigation

Through this study, the researcher examined ninth grade Latino males attitudes and beliefs about ninth grade success and school non-completion. The researcher designed the study to provide vital information that can aid district leaders in developing policies and practices to address this issue. To that end, the researcher explored the perceptions of ninth grade Latino male students regarding the factors that "push" or "pull" students out of school prior to school completion and the earning of a high school diploma. Understanding this topic is critical if the district is to obtain its goal of 90% of students graduating on time by SY20. Additionally, gaining greater insight into the internal factors that lead to early school leaving can help the district develop or enhance intervention programs to support Latino male students.

While past research studies have examined the factors that influence students' decisions to drop out of school, there is limited research focused on Latino male students. This study delved deep to examine specifically these students' ninth grade year and its impact on school completion success. The perspectives of students collected by this researcher as part of this study shed a light on the myriad factors that support or hinder ninth grade success. The findings of the study can contribute to district efforts to develop policies and practices to support the efforts of administrators and teachers at the school level.

The researcher conducted a qualitative study that involved the use of focus group sessions that gave voice to the perspectives of Latino male students and provided rich

narratives and deeper insight into their experiences and insights than would a quantitative survey. The researcher selected student participants from three of the eight high schools (School A, School B, and School C) in the county in which Latino male students make up at least 40% of the student populations. Two of the identified high schools—Schools B and C—qualified as low-graduation-rate high schools. It is important to note that the two selected low-graduation-rate schools have seasoned principals, with at least two years of experience, and a large comprehensive student population. Additionally, School A, led by a novice principal is the first state-identified Title I school in District X, because of the low socioeconomic status and FARMS eligibility of at least 70% of the student population

Summary

This section included provided an introduction to the problem of focus for this study, and provided valuable background and contextual information to situate the problem within the current national and state landscape. The section also included a discussion of the internal push factors within schools and the external pull factors that contribute to the dropout rate of Latino male students. The literature in this section examined theories that suggest academic factors, and social, cultural and family influences that have significant effects on school outcomes. Section II will provide further details on the research methodology utilized in this study, including the research questions, the study participants, the location of the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures used to respond to the research question.

SECTION II: METHODOLOGY

Section II describes the methods selected for use in this study. The section includes a description of the study's overall design, positionality, trustworthiness, its participants, and all data collection and analysis procedures.

According to its "Strategic Plan," District X (2015) has expressed notable concern about the graduation rate of its Hispanic/Latino male students. As of school year 2016, the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for this group of students was 62.04% (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2017). This figure is 19.4 percentage points below the county rate of 81.44% for the same year (MSDE, 2017). These data indicated that almost 38% of the district's Latino male population left school prior to receiving a diploma that year. As the enrollment of Latino male students increases, the district must find ways to address this burgeoning achievement gap. Understanding the factors that lead students to leave school before graduation can help the district develop or enhance interventions and programs to support Latino male students.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study examined the internal and external factors that either "push," "pull," or provide support for Latino male students' school completion through an exploration of the perspectives of ninth-grade Latino male students. As discussed in Section I, existing research suggested that numerous factors can influence Latino male students' success in the ninth grade. While Rumberger (2011) identified push and pull factors that contributed to early school leaving among Latino and Black students, this inquiry also investigated the supportive factors that can keep students in school. Table 7 list examples of each of these factors:

Table 7

Push and Pull Factors That Influence Dropout and Retention Rates

Push factors (internal factors that push students out of school)	Pull factors (external forces that pull students from school)	Pull factors (supportive factors that keep students in school)

• Strict attendance policies
• Discipline policies
  o Zero tolerance
  o Disproportionate consequences based on race and gender
• Course failure
  o Grading policy
  o Lack of interventions
• Teachers' low expectations and/or cultural bias
  o Lack of culturally responsive teaching
  o Lack of understanding of students' culture
  o Deficit thinking mindset regarding minority male students
• Relationship with school/teachers
• Transition from middle school
• Retention
• Newcomers policy
	• Gangs
	• Parenthood
	• Economics
	• Family (La Familia) pressure/Obligations
	• Cultural values
		• Resilience
		• Family pressure
		• Family expectations
		• Relationships
		• Sense of belonging
		• Aspirations
		• Mentoring

Heaton (2013) suggested that all Latino male students faced the same challenges of racism, economic hardship, and structural inequalities in school that often lead to course failure for their White and Black peers. Heaton further explained that factors like a sense of belonging, teacher and student relationships, resilience, aspirations, and persistence could pull Latino students to stay in school, thereby increasing Latino male

graduation rates. Understanding the factors that influence students to leave school early can help District X leaders ensure that schools have access to effective intervention programs that will support Latino male students more effectively.

Research Questions

The following overarching research questions guided the development and implementation of this study:

1. Do high-risk 9th grade Latino male students perceive push and pull factors differently than do 9th grade Latino male students who are at low or no risk of dropping out?
2. Do high-risk 9th grade Latino male student perceive supportive pull factors differently than do 9th grade Latino male students who are at low risk of dropping out?

Study Design

The researcher used an exploratory qualitative research design to address the research questions and examine the factors that influenced student perceptions about Latino male students' ninth-grade success. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) stated that qualitative research provides an understanding of a social setting or activity from the perspective of the research participants. The authors further suggested that qualitative research included individual person-to-person interactions that allowed the researcher to describe the meaning of the finding from the perspective of the participants. Similarly**,** Creswell (2012) explained that qualitative research is useful for understanding and giving meaning to participants' lived experiences. He noted that qualitative inquiry is

particularly valuable when a researcher seeks to study a group or population with historically "silenced voices" (Creswell, 2012).

In the current study, the researcher used focus groups to collect data and engage in face-to-face interactions with participants. Marczak and Sewell (2000) noted that in a qualitative exploratory design, focus groups provide information on how groups of people think or feel about a particular topic. Nagle and Williams (2013) added that group interviews enable the researcher to capture deeper information more economically than do individual interviews. The authors also explained that group interactions between members of the target population may encourage others to make connections with each other, the questions posed by the researcher and with their shared experiences (Nagle & Williams, 2013).

Researchers have also found that focus groups are particularly useful with groups of Latino males and provide unique insights into the students' perspective. Hanks-Sloan (2015), for example, conducted student focus groups with English language learners (ELLs) in three high schools with similar demographics and similar ninth-grade promotion and graduation rates. She utilized a staff person familiar to the students to introduce the purpose of the session and to help the researcher establish a rapport with the students. The focus group sessions facilitated the collection of data on factors that support ELLs success and acclimation to school. Hanks-Sloan stated that the focus group session provided an opportunity for her to dig deep and elicit responses from students based on a series of prompts. The researcher replicated this process at each of the three target schools to help build rapport and comfort with students.

Similarly, Harper and Williams (2014) conducted focus groups with 325 Latino and Black male high school students to examine factors that influenced their success. The researchers utilized selected focus groups to garner the unique insights of Latino and Black male students and to provide a level of comfort that encouraged the students to be candid in responding to the questions. The researcher replicated the processes that Harper and Williams used to gain parental consent and student assent in the present study.

Themes emerged from the present study that will help with the development of future studies, scales, or interventions. Results will also provide key data to aid District X in efforts to design additional research tools and methods for exploring the topic.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research helps to ensure the quality of the research. Taylor, Bogden & DeVault (2016) stated that credibility, the first component of trustworthiness, addresses the researcher's level of confidence in the truth of the findings or the degree to which the researcher knows that the findings are true and accurate. Siegle (2015) drew a similar conclusion, noting that the researcher must answer the question—"Does it ring true?" The comprehensive focus group questions, the direct audio-recording, the review of the transcriptions, and the use of peer checking for emerging themes all led the researcher to experience a high level of confidence regarding the accuracy of the data collected. Additionally, the participants' responses reflected research literature on factors that affect student school completion success.

Taylor, Bogden & DeVault (2016) defined conformability, the second component of trustworthiness, as the level of neutrality in the research study's findings and the degree to which the data are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias

or personal motivations of the researcher. Further, Siegle (2015) shared that conformability is the product focus of the results of the inquiry not the bias of the researcher. To this end, the researcher coded and analyzed all data to identify emerging themes and reported findings based on the number of participant references and the direct quotations of students. This process eliminated the influence of the researcher's personal bias in reporting the study's results.

Taylor, Bogden and DeVault (2016) and Siegle (2015) explained that the last component of trustworthiness, transferability, demonstrates that the research findings are applicable to other contexts and similar situations, populations, and phenomena. While the present study focused on Latino males in the 9th grade, the findings may be applicable to other grade levels of Latino male students. The findings may not be as easily transferrable to African-American or White males, because of the unique cultural, school, home and background experiences of Latino males.

The aforementioned strategies are useful in verifying trustworthiness in qualitative research. In this study, each of the strategies helped ensure the trustworthiness of the research process. Each of the strategies listed above were useful in ensuring the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

Researcher Positionality

Foote and Bartell (2011) defined positionality as the researcher's world-view and the stance he has chosen to adopt in relation to a specific research task. Similarly, Dillard (2000) suggested that each time a researcher engages in research, she is (re)searching herself all over again, in addition to studying something or someone else. This self-reflection on the part of the researcher is critical when conducting racially- or culturally-

related research. Ford, Moore, Whiting, and Grantham (2008) reported that researchers conducting cross-cultural research should be mindful of the need to consider their own humanness, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and values when working with participants from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds that differ from their own.

Dillard (2000) argued that People of Color historically have been misrepresented, exploited, silenced, and taken for granted in education research. Dillard also contended that researchers should not regard People of Color as White people with pigmented or colored skin. On the contrary, their experiences are shaped by (among other things) their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage.

To identify and recognize my own biases and preconceived notions, and ensure the accuracy of the findings, I had to reflect on both my insider and outsider role as the researcher. Collins (1999) asserted that Black women hold a special relationship to research, as they have historically been positioned as both insider (as caregiver) and outsider (due to their racial makeup). In my role as the researcher, I had to build a trusting relationship with the student respondents. As an African-American female executive and employee in District X, I am neither a supervisor of teachers, principals, or students at the three selected schools. While Milner (2007) purported that he does not believe that researchers must come from the racial or cultural community under study to conduct research in, with, and about that community; I had to consider my race and gender when pondering how the students' comfort level with me and my purpose for selecting Latino males. I also had to consider the seen and unforeseen dangers of cross cultural research. While I could not directly relate to the challenges many Latino

students, specifically males, have faced in schools and in American society as a whole—particularly with the current political landscape—my passion, desire, and dedication to supporting students' academic attainment and ensuring that schools lead them to a path to success is a significant factor in my selection of this research topic.

As I conducted this study, I reflected on my philosophical and personal perspective. As a novice, I had to ensure that my passion and political beliefs on both of the aforementioned topics did not influence my research findings.

I have been an employee in District X for 30 years. I have served in various school and central office positions, and I am familiar with the district programs and policies. I often ask myself whether we consistently practice the many mission statements purported by the district that promise equitable access and treatment of all students and staff. In my opinion, there have been times when the answer has been "No." In District X, select student groups (e.g., special education students, African-American males, and most recently, Latino males) have often experienced disenfranchisement and marginalization in our classrooms and through our policies. I made the decision to champion these groups when I worked as a special education teacher in the district. My students reported that they had less value than their peers; they felt unworthy, and the irony is that many adults saw them that way too. These students experienced low expectations and reported receiving little support from the District X middle school.

In 2014, District X's Latino enrollment increased at a rapid pace, with large numbers of second-generation students and newcomers or newly arrived first generation students entering our high schools. To address this burgeoning population, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) created a taskforce to research strategies for supporting these

students' high school and graduation success. One strategy introduced in New York was the establishment of International Schools. In 2016, District X investigated the possibility of replicating this model. District leaders and elected officials held town meetings for students and parents to discuss the possibility of establishing two international high schools in the northern and southern geographic region of District X. There was significant opposition to the proposal. During one meeting, I witnessed adults sharing their opinions of "those kids." That singular event caused me to pause and rethink our community's equitable treatment of students. That night, I committed to working with schools to develop strategies to increase ninth-grade promotion rates and decrease dropout rates for all students with a particular emphasis on Latino male since this was the subgroup with the largest performance gap. Further, the Diversity Officer asked me to support focus group sessions in four high schools with large populations of Latino students. The students shared various concerns that they had regarding their teachers, insufficient school supports, and the district's failure to foster a sense of belonging among the students. I had to separate these experience and my personal feelings from the data collection and analysis process.

Site and Sample Selection

The researcher identified three high schools that served as target sites for this inquiry. These schools were selected based on their high enrollment of Latino students and the disparities in graduation, dropout and ninth grade promotion rates between these students and their non-Latino counterparts (see Section I).

School Site Descriptions

School A. School A is located in the northern most geographic region of District X. With a Free and Reduced Meals percentage of 81%, the school meets the state requirement for Title I status. The student enrollment is 2,654 students. Table 8 provides details on the demographics of the student population.

Table 8

School A Student Demographics

Ethnicity	**Percentage**
Hispanic	83.8%
African American	7.60%
White	4.70%
Two or more races	2.90%
Asian	0.9%
Other characteristics	**Percentage**
Free or reduced meals (FARMS)	79.8%
Limited English proficiency	41.3%
Special Education	8.3%
Mobility	37.7%

(District X, 2017)

Leadership. The principal of School A was a novice first-year African-American woman who was not fluent in Spanish, despite the fact that her school has the second

highest percentage of ESOL students in the district. She replaced a principal who was fluent in Spanish and was embraced and accepted by the school community. The transfer of leadership caused a level of unrest amongst the school's staff, students, and parents. In response to the community concerns, the district assigned two new Hispanic assistant principals to the school to join the current Hispanic assistant principal and the two African American assistant principals.

Academics. The graduation rate for School A during school year 2016-17 was 62.46%, the dropout rate was 29.23%, and the ninth-grade promotion rate was 85% (Maryland Report Card, 2017). Student performance on the 2016-17 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments was significantly below the state average, with only 8.20% of the students scoring proficient or advanced on the Algebra I PARCC and 23% scoring proficient or advanced on the English 10 PARCC. National assessment data for school year 2016-17 was also below the state and national averages. Students at School A earned an average score of 819 on the PSAT, which was 99 points below the state average. They also earned an average score of 924 on the SAT that same year, which fell 123 points below the state average. Additionally, only 27.29% of the students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and earned the College Board's required score of 3 or more on the subsequent AP end-of-course examinations. The school's annual budget is $11,175,994 District X, 2017).

Other characteristics. Gang activity, specifically the recruitment activities and disruptive behaviors of a well-known gang—to be termed "Gang A" for the purposes of this study—caused student unrest and public distrust of the safety and security of the

school for the past five years. Reported gang activity at the school included assault, arson, and drug distribution (Earl, 2017). Data indicate that collaborative efforts between District X, county police, and elected officials resulted in decreases in gang activity during the 2016-17 school year. District X created a cross-agency taskforce to address the major concerns in the school. Staff from the district's Diversity Office, the Department of Social Services, the County Police's Gang Taskforce and the elected officials that represent the school's constituents meet regularly to identify internal and external resources to support students' academic achievement, guarantee their safety, and ensure that they meet the needs of the students and their families. The elected officials have also demanded that the district CEO consider prioritizing the School A on the district's Capital Improvement list because of the age of the school and current overcrowding at the facility.

Political factors. The student body at School A reacted negatively and publicly to local and national discussions and proposed legislation regarding immigration. Their reactions resulted in over 1,000 students walking out of school and staging a protest on one of the district's busiest highways. In response to this newsworthy event, elected officials began meeting monthly with students and families that resided in the school's boundaries to provide support and resources.

School B. School B is located in the central region of District X. Student enrollment at the school totals 1,954 students. Table 9 presents demographic information for School B's student population.

Leadership. School B was led by an African-American female with four years of tenure at the school. The position at School B was her first principalship; she had

previously served as a middle school assistant principal for two years. The principal was not fluent in Spanish. School B had five assistant principals, all African-American, none of whom were fluent in Spanish. According to the school's staff and community stakeholders, this cross-cultural leadership and language barrier had not presented major obstacles within the school community.

Table 9

School B Student Demographics

Ethnicity	Percentage
Hispanic	67.2%
African American	30.3%
White	1.20%
Asian	0.9%
Other characteristics	**Percentage**
Free or reduced meals (FARMS)	73.0%
Limited English proficiency	29.5%
Special Education	11.6%
Mobility	27.4%

(Source: District X, 2017)

Academics. The graduation rate for the 2016-17 school year was 73.54%, the dropout rate was 21.52%, and the ninth grade promotion rate was 80.6%. Student performance on the PARCC state assessments was significantly below the state average.

Only 9.5% of Algebra I PARCC test takers scored in the proficient or advanced range, and 17.5% scored in the proficient or advance range for English 10. On national assessments, students scored 792 on the PSAT, which was 126 points below the state average; and 926 on the SAT, which reflected a performance gap of 120 points. Further, 13.33% of students enrolled in AP classes scored the required 3 or more on the end-of-course AP exam. This score was 50% below the state average. The school's annual budget is $8,081,744 District X, 2017).

One unique feature of School B is the Career and Technology Education programs offered at the school. The variety of programs (i.e., cosmetology, masonry, carpentry, automotive, barbering, and culinary arts) has large enrollments of Latino students. Through these programs, students can prepare for state licensure or union tests for postsecondary trade school enrollment.

Other characteristics. The school's reported gang activity reflected a decrease in the number of incidents over the last three years that involved Gang A and the other crews with predominately Latino students (Earl, 2017). The school's administration and community leaders had made a concerted effort to host cultural activities and provide ongoing diversity training to students and staff. There were minimal reports of cross-cultural altercations in the school, although there were a number of neighborhood crews both African-American and Latino.

Table 10

School C Student Demographics

Ethnicity	**Percentage**
Hispanic	65.6%
African American	29.0%
White	2.7%
Asian	1.7%
Two or more races	1.0%
Other characteristics	**Percentage**
Free or reduced meals (FARMS)	71.2%
Limited English proficiency	32.9%
Special Education	10.1%
Mobility	29.5%

(District X, 2017)

School C. School C is located in the northeast region of District X. The school is one mile from the state's largest Division I university. The school serves 2,316 students in Grades 9-12. Table 10 provides demographic information for the school's student population.

Leadership. School C was led by an African-American female principal with a four-year tenure at the school. Unlike the other schools in this study, the principal was a former Spanish teacher and was fluent in the language, which allowed for greater

communication with students and parents. She had been able to foster relationships with the community, but she was having difficulty with staff buy-in and collaboration. This in-fighting came from years of low expectations, changes in the demographics of the student population, and apathy towards the students amongst a segment of the school staff that had been a vocal minority and had worked against reform and change at the school.

Academics. School C's graduation rate for the 2016-17 school year was 69.34%, and the ninth grade promotion rate was 81.1%. That same year, 6.3% of students scored proficient or advanced on the state's Algebra 1 PARCC test and 21.5% scored proficient or advanced on the English 10 assessment. On national exams, students at School C earned an average combined score of 735 on the PSAT and 928 on the SAT, which reflected a performance gap of 183 points and 118 points respectively from the state average on both tests. Additionally, 24.35% of students scored a 3 or above on Advanced Placement tests that year, which was 58.75 points below the state average. The school's annual budget was $9,2220,834 (District X, 2017).

Other characteristics. Like School A, School C had experienced the longest history of gang violence of any high school in District X. Five-year trend data showed significant incidents of assaults, strong arm robberies, weapons, and fighting (Earl, 2017). The majority of the incidents involved "Gang C" and other student-identified Latino neighborhood crews. The two feeder schools for School C also had high gang activity, as reported by Earl (2017). School C also had the largest number of teen parents in District X (Hudson, 2017). The school has an onsite daycare center, and most of the teen parents are Latina.

School C is the northern high school that hosts District X's Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) program. Student audition and are accepted through the District's lottery program. Although the school's Latino population is 65.6%, only 12% of the Latino students at School C are enrolled in the VPA program**.**

From these sites, the researcher sought to recruit ninth-grade Latino male students to participate in five focus groups. For purposes of this study, Latina females were excluded. While the data suggest that Latina female students reflects significant gaps from the aggregate in graduation, dropout and ninth grade promotion rate, the gap for Latino male students is significantly higher and alarming for the district.

Subject Sampling

The researcher began recruitment activities after receiving approval to conduct this inquiry from the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A) and the District X Administrative Offices (see Appendix B). The site and sample selection process included three steps: (a) identifying eligible participants; (b) participant sample; and (c) scheduling the focus group sessions at each of the three schools. The following subsections provide further details on each of these steps.

Identifying eligible participants. After meeting with the principals of each school and obtaining all necessary approvals for the study, the researcher met with the registrar at each school to identify 150 ninth-grade Latino male students out of each school' total population of the referenced group. The students were identified using the District X Data Management System's Enrollment Report data. Only English-speaking or Advanced ESOL students were eligible to participate, due to the cost constraints that would be involved in using a focus group interpreter/transcriber. After identifying

potential participants, the researcher visited each school to meet with the identified eligible students to explain the study and distribute student assent (see Appendices C and D) and parent consent forms (see Appendices E and F). To incentivize the return of the signed forms, the researcher offered students a bag of treats. Additionally, the community outreach assistant (COA) assigned to each school received an email (see Appendix G) requesting assistance with translation if parents had questions regarding the study. The researcher also sent a follow-up email to each principal (see Appendix H) summarizing the study introductory meeting and describing the purpose of the study.

After gathering the pool of eligible candidates and collecting the first round of signed permission slips, the researcher provided the first group of returned consent forms to one of the District X Data Analysts. The response rate was low with the return of 43, 51 and 19 permission slips respectively for Study Schools B, C and A. The Data Analyst used the returned assent and consent forms to identify the potential sample based upon students' first quarter SY 16-17 Early Warning Indicator Report (EWIR) status, which uses reading and math assessment scores, Grade Point Average, discipline and attendance data to provide educators with predictive indicators—green (low risk or on track)) and red (high risk)—which indicate the degree to which a student is likely to being promoted or non-promoted to the next grade level.

Once the students' returned slips were sorted by green or red (yellow or moderate risk) students were eliminated for purposes of this study which was designed to purposively select students at the extremes. Identified students received a second assent form and an invitation to participate in the study. Once the second round permission slips were returned, the researcher selected and assigned 11 students each from School B and

C and seven students from School A, for a total of 29 participants across five focus groups. The final sample size was based on each school's student response, returned final permission forms and the recommended number for an effective focus group session.

According to McBurney and White (2009), a multi-stage sampling technique allows researchers to divide large populations into stages to make the sampling process more practical. In the case of the present study, this process enabled the researcher to identify the pool of eligible candidates and the final sample of green and red students. Figure 2 illustrates the multi-stage sampling process used to select research participants.

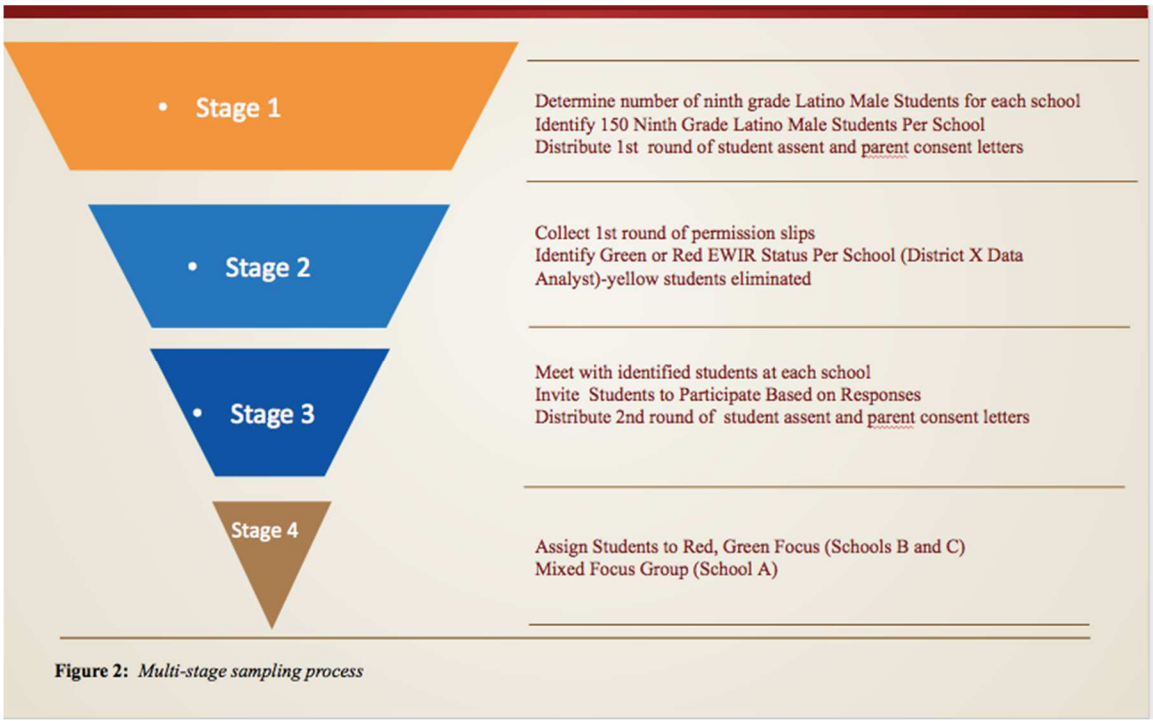

Figure 2. *Multi-stage sampling process.*

The use of both red and green students allowed the researcher to interview students that persist and are identified as highly likely for promotion, as well as students identified as at risk for non-promotion. The perceptions of both groups will provide

insight into factors that support or hinder students' school engagement and ninth-grade success.

Participant sample. The researcher identified 11 ninth-grade male Latino students at Schools B and C and seven ninth-grade Latino male students from School A who were eligible to participate. Because of the limited number of signed and returned forms in School A, the researcher had to create a mixed group including both green and red students.

The researcher characterized study participants using several items included in the demographic survey (Appendix I). The survey contained items related to participants' country of origin, age, generation in the U.S., number of years in the U.S., number of years in District X, native/1st language, employment status, and participation in after-school activities. Table 11 presents the demographic profile of each of the study's focus groups.

The average age of the green students was14.4, the average for red students was 14.6, and the mixed group students averaged 14.25. The data showed that all participants were first-time ninth graders, and no students had been retained in a previous grade. The students were born in seven different countries—El Salvador (n=13), Mexico (n=7), United States (n=3), Guatemala (n=2), Dominican Republic (n=2), Nicaragua (n=1), and Honduras (n=1). While 26 of the participants were born outside of the United States, the data indicated that, on average, the students had spent a significant number of years in the country--green (13.5), red (14.6), and Mixed (14.25).

The data also showed that most of the students had spent the majority of their formative years in the United States. Participant data also indicated that the average

number of years that the students had been enrolled in District X was as follows: green (10.5), red (8.9) and mixed (7.5). The researcher also found that some students shared that they did not enter school in Pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten. Fourteen of the 29 participants reported that their first language was English, although the language spoken most at home was Spanish for all participants. The other 15 respondents considered Spanish to be their first language; although they were fluent in English, and only two were still enrolled in advanced ESOL classes. Only one of the students reported working after school, a finding that might have been due to the average age (14 years old) of the students and theage requirement (15 years old) for students to receive a state work permit. Only 12 of the 29 participants reported taking part in sports or extracurricular activities—three were enrolled in the Hillside Work Scholarship Mentoring Program, which provides 360-degree support for students. Table 11 provides a demographic profile of study participants.

Distributing invitation letters. Once the researcher identified the pool of potential green and red subjects, she distributed a letter in English and in Spanish to students' parents/guardians, inviting the pool of youth to participate in the study. The letter explained that their child had been selected because he was a ninth grader at one of the Study Schools, and because the district was interested in learning how it could better support the graduation success of Latino boys. The researcher offered food and a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card for each focus group as incentives for students' participation. The letter assured the confidentiality of the participants and their responses.

Table 11

Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants

Focus group	Country of origin	Average age	Average years in the U.S.	Average years in District X	Number of 1st language English speakers	Average years in 9th grade	Number employed	Number that participate in school activities	Number that participate in sports	Other activities
Green	8 El Salvador 1 Guatemala 1 Mexico 1 Honduras	14.4	13.5	10.5	5	1	None	6	4 (soccer, football)	1 (ROTC)
Red	4 Mexico 3 U.S. 2 El Salvador 1 Dominican Republic	14.6	13.9	8.9	6	1	None	3	2 (baseball, basketball)	None
Mixed	3 El Salvador 2 Mexico 1 Nicaragua 1 Dominican Republic 1 Guatemala	14.25	8.75	7.5	3	1	1	4	2 (baseball, football)	3 (Hillside Work Scholarship Program)

Scheduling focus groups. Each of the five focus group sessions lasted for 45 minutes. This timeframe allowed the researcher to provide an overview of the study and develop a rapport with the student participants. A research assistant accompanied the investigator and assisted with note taking and audio recordings. The sessions took place during the students' lunch period in an unoccupied room at the school, which reduced distractions and the potential for student traffic. The researcher provided food, snacks, and drinks for the participants.

Prior to the study, the researcher conducted four focus group sessions with a team of District X staff, spearheaded by the district's Diversity Officer's conducted at high schools with large ninth-grade Latino male population. The aforementioned high schools are not included in the study. Her goal was to interview students to determine supports needed for their increased school achievement and success. The researcher reviewed the steps utilized and the processes outlined during the sessions to determine to determine whether enhancements or changes were necessary prior to the start of the inquiry.

The researcher determined that no adjustments were needed and scheduled the first formal focus group. The researcher began each session by explaining the purpose of the study and assuring the students that their responses would remain confidential. This time also served as an opportunity to establish a rapport with participants and encourage their candid participation. The students completed a short demographic survey on paper before the discussion began. The researcher coded the surveys using the students' EWIR (red or green) status. After collecting the surveys, the researcher began to ask the focus group questions and encouraged students to provide their thoughts about each query. The

researcher and research assistant audio-recorded each session and took copious notes as a backup for the transcriptions of the recorded focus group discussions. During the sessions, the researcher also made observational notes regarding the tenor and nonverbal communications of student participants. After each session, the researcher and research assistant met to debrief and reflect on the successes and challenges that emerged during the focus group, noting whether any changes or modifications should be made to the protocol prior to the next focus group session.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection process involved two key instruments: the demographic survey and the focus group protocol. The researcher used the demographic survey to obtain information about students' years in the country, years in the district, pass retention, generation status, and year in ninth grade; and the data collected provided valuable background and context for individual student responses. The focus group questions queried students on their perceptions of internal push factors, external pull factors, and supportive pull factors that helped or hindered their success and decision to remain in school.

Demographic survey. To collect the necessary demographic data, the researcher developed a brief survey consisting of nine short-response questions (Appendix I). The researcher based the survey on questions used in Hanks-Sloan (2015); which, in turn, drew from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005).

Focus group questions. The researcher reviewed existing interview and focus group questions (Appendix J) to determine their usefulness, based on key concepts from the literature that aligned with the study's purpose, conceptual framework, and research questions. The questions focused on eliciting from the students the school- and home-based "push" and "pull" factors that, in the students' opinions, led to the success or failure of Latino male ninth-grade students. As with the survey questions, the researcher developed the focus group protocol by modifying survey and interview questions used in the CILS and employed by Hanks-Sloan (2015) and Bradley and Renzulli (2011), both of whom explored the factors that affect Latino students' school non-completion.

The CILS was designed to study the adaptation process of the immigrant second-generation or United States-born children with at least one foreign-born parent or children born abroad but brought at an early age to the United States. The survey was conducted with large samples of second-generation immigrant children attending the 8th and 9th grades in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale in Florida and San Diego, California. The first survey took place in 1992 to determine baseline information on demographic characteristics, language use, self-identities, and academic attainment. In 1995, during the time the participants were about to graduate, the researchers administered a follow-up survey. The purpose of the study was to examine the evolution of key adaptation outcomes, including language knowledge and preference, ethnic identity, self-esteem, academic attainment over the adolescent years, ethnic and racial identities, attitudes and levels of identification with American schools and society, and plans for the future (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005).

Hanks-Sloan (2015) modified questions from the aforementioned CILS and research conducted by Suárez-Orozco (1995). The questions from both studies considered the following factors: (a) value and perceptions of education, (b) expectations about achieving their long-term goals, (c) current level of education, (d) expectations before coming to the United States, 5) family obligations, and 6) future aspirations. This researcher received approval from Hanks-Sloan (see Appendix L) to use and modify these questions for the present study.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, the researcher utilized the data from the demographic survey to calculate a series of descriptive statistics, which included the frequency of responses to each question. These data led to a description of participant characteristics, descriptive phrases or words used by participants as they discussed the key questions, themes in the responses to the key questions, subthemes indicating a point of view held by participants with common characteristics, descriptions of participants' enthusiasm, consistency between participants' comments and their reported behaviors, body language, and new avenues of questioning that should be considered in future. These considerations included whether questions should be revised, eliminated, or added and whether the overall mood of the discussion helped further lead the researcher in reporting the perspectives of the Latino male ninth-grade students.

The analysis of the qualitative data from the focus groups began with the transcription of all recorded data. The researcher then inspected, cleaned, and coded the resulting data to identify information that spoke to the research question (Ader,

Mellenbergh, & Hand, 2008). Cleaning the data involved spot-checking the transcriptions for comprehensibility and comparing a small number of the transcriptions and written notes to ensure that the data were transcribed correctly and attributed to the correct red or green band group.

The researcher used NVivo qualitative software to organize and code the transcribed information from the student focus groups to make sense of the unstructured data and provide a basis for the clustering of data into themes. The coding process utilized included the following steps: (1) coding data from the transcripts while identifying the number of references for each topic, (2) placing references in simple broad categories, (3) reviewing categories and identifying the groupings that were most common and had the largest number of references, (4) combining categories that were most common and had similarities, and (5) identifying emergent themes. To develop appropriate codes, the researcher identified key words, phrases, and sentences that occurred frequently throughout the data collected from the five focus groups. This process yielded many codes, which required the classification of the themes into seven categories of particular relevance to the research question and supported in the literature review.

Summary

Section II described the research questions, researcher positionality, trustworthiness, participants and the qualitative research methodology used in the study. The findings of the study will be presented in Section III.

Section III: Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Through this investigation, the researcher examined ninth-grade male Latino students' perceptions of the push, pull, and supportive pull factors that contributed to their academic success and retention. This section provides the thematic findings from the data obtained through five focus groups. The section also presents a discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations for increasing the ninth grade promotion and graduation rates of Latino males, and considerations for future research.

The following results summarize the data collected from a total of 29 Latino male ninth-grade students who each participated in one of five focus groups across three schools. The respondents first completed a demographic questionnaire and participated in a focus group interview aimed at soliciting information about the students' perceptions of the factors that contributed to school retention. The researcher divided the participants into five distinct focus groups based on the District X EWIR variables: (a) the green focus group, (b) the red focus group, and (c) the mixed focus group. The green focus group only included students at low risk of not passing the ninth grade, while the red focus group only included students at high risk of not passing the ninth grade. The mixed focus group included both green low-risk and red high-risk students

The following research questions served as a guide during the data collection and analysis processes:

1. Do high-risk ninth grade Latino male students perceive push and pull factors differently than do ninth grade Latino male student who are at low or no risk of dropping out?

2. Do high-risk ninth grade Latino male students perceive supportive pull factors differently than do ninth grade Latino male student who are at low or no risk of dropping out?

Description of Focus Groups

This section provides observations of the interactions and flow of discussion that took place during the five focus groups. There were no language barriers because all students were advanced ESOL or were not enrolled in ESOL.

The two green focus groups. In both Study Schools B and C, the green focus group was comprised of 12 students (six students from each school) who are at low risk of ninth grade non-completion based upon the predictive variables used in the district's EWIR. The green students were playful, engaged, and fed off of their peers' responses. Students encouraged their peers to participate, and there was great discourse and reflection throughout the focus group sessions. The students were very reflective and candid about their school and home experiences. Members of the green focus groups showed compassion and empathy when a classmate shared an unpleasant experience about their home life. This concern was especially evident as students shared the plight of their parents' journeys to the United States and their struggles once they arrived.

At Study School B, three green students were very extroverted and entered the session in a jovial and playful manner. After my introductions of the researcher and research assistant, and my explanation of the process, the students shared that they did not know what to expect and were a little apprehensive. Overwhelmingly, at the conclusion of the focus group sessions, they shared that they appreciated the opportunity

to share their academic and cultural experiences. The green group at Study School C had one dominant member that was very candid and freely expressed his experiences at home and in school. The student was always the first to respond and encouraged others throughout the session. In general, the green focus groups lasted 50 minutes and were characterized by significant interaction and feedback from the students who were engaged in the project and with the researcher.

The two red focus groups. The red focus groups were comprised of ten participants (five students from each school) across Study Schools B and C. Students in this group had been identified as being at high risk of ninth grade non-completion, based on the five predictive variables used in the EWIR. Unlike the green groups at Schools B and C, who were exuberant and reflective, several members of the red group were initially very introverted and provided monosyllabic responses. Students in this group often drifted off of the question and had to be guided back by the researcher. Additionally, in Study School B, the researcher had to probe continuously to obtain more information about the students' personal experiences. After monitoring the interactions of this group in the first focus group session, the researcher adjusted the process for the second study school by utilizing more wait time and adopting a more probing stance. In general, the red focus groups lasted 45 minutes and were characterized by very little verbal responses on the part of students. Although students used non-verbal cues to suggest their agreement with a statement, there was very little elaboration or interaction among the students.

Mixed focus group. The fifth focus group in Study School A was comprised of four green students and three red students. The lower number of participants was due to a low consent response rate from the eligible students.

The green students were more dominant in the mixed group, based upon the frequency and length of the students' responses. They were the first to respond and maintained engagement, enthusiasm, and eye contact throughout the focus group session. They became the self-appointed directors of the focus group activity. One green student would call on each of the three red students after each question asking if they had an answer. One particularly poignant moment was when one of the green students comforted a red student when he shared his frustration with keeping up in one of his classes. He was honest that he was failing and felt little support from the teacher or from home because of his parent's work schedule. The green student offered to serve as his peer tutor and gave him a fist pump saying, "You can do it." During the mixed group session, the researcher used pauses and probes to draw out more responses and garner more details. Additionally, the researcher attempted to include all participants by soliciting responses from quiet students. Figure 3 provides an overview of the focus group observations.

Themes

The data that follow was obtained from five distinct focus groups conducted with male Latino ninth-grade students. The observations and data analyzed from each group revealed that the green (low-risk) students were more critical, more reflective, and more communicative than their red (high-risk) peers. In general, low-risk students were more descriptive and articulate in their explanation of the various push, pull, and supportive

factors that influenced their retention in high school. The data also revealed that green students were more reflective in their responses for all questions posed by the researcher. As a reminder, a *push factor* is something that occurs in the school that negatively affects students' social, personal, and/or academic success; and a *pull factor* is a negative influence that "pulls" or lures children from school. *Supportive pull factors* are found both inside and outside of the school building and positively affect students' school completion. These positive influences "pull" students toward high school completion.

GREEN	RED	MIXED
Playful Engaged Fed off of peers' responses Encouraged their peers to participate Great discourse and reflection Very candid about their school and home experiences Showed compassion and empathy to classmates School B, three green students very extroverted Entered the session in a jovial and playful manner School C, one dominant member	Very introverted at the start Provided monosyllabic responses. Often drifted off of the question and had to be guided back by the researcher School B, probing to obtain more information about the students' personal experiences Adjusted the process for the second school Used more wait time Adopted a more probing stance	Green students were more dominant Provided lengthier and more frequent responses First to respond Maintained engagement, enthusiasm, and eye contact Became the self-appointed directors of the focus group activity Green students called on each of the three red students after each question Researcher solicited responses from quiet students

Figure 3: *Focus Group Observations*

Eight major thematic findings emerged from this study. The themes are listed below and grouped by pull, push or supportive pull factors. The researcher used the themes to categorize the feedback that was provided.

Pull factor themes. As noted previously, pull factors are external to the control of the school (e.g., family, peers and the community). The four pull factors themes that

emerged from the data included (1) financial burdens, (2) clashing cultures, (3) negative peer pressure and influence, and (4) negative personal outlook. Although the first three are characterized as beyond the control of the school, the fourth factor, negative personal outlook, is influenced by forces both within and without.

Push factor themes. As noted previously, push factors occur within the school's locus of control. The two push factor themes that emerged during the study were (5) school pedagogical and support issues and (6) school schedule is not ideal.

Supportive pull factor themes. To review, supportive pull factors support Latino male students' school engagement and have a positive impact on students. The two supportive pull factors themes revealed in this study were (7) family and (8) friends.

Table 12

References to Pull and Push Factor Themes

Themes	Green focus groups (N=11)	Red focus groups (N=11)	Mixed focus group (N=7)	Total references
Pull factor: Financial burdens	*	*	0	21
Pull factor: Clashing cultures	*			10
Pull factor: Negative peer pressure and influence	*	*	*	34
Pull factor: Negative personal outlook	*			12
Push factors: School pedagogical and support issues	*	*	*	45
Push factors: School schedule is not ideal	*	*		13

*Note: An * indicates the theme was identified at least one time in the focus group transcript*

Based on the analysis of focus group response data, the overarching emergent themes related to push, pull, and supportive pull factors that were found more abundantly in the Green focus group compared to the Red and Mixed focus groups. These themes are listed below in Table 12, which includes the corresponding number of references found across all of the focus group transcripts.

Table 13

References to Supportive Pull Factors Themes

Subthemes: Supportive factors	Green focus groups (N=11)	Red focus groups (N=11)	Mixed focus group (N=7)	Total references
Supportive pull factors: Family	*	*	*	29
Supportive pull factors: Friends	*		*	15

*Note: An * indicates the theme was identified at least one time in the focus group transcript*

Findings

The following sections detail the thematic findings and highlight the evidence culled from the verbatim responses of the focus group sessions. The students' responses provide support for each of the themes. Direct quotes from the respondents bring the students' perceptions of their school and home experiences to light. The section is organized by theme category in accordance with Tables 12 and 13.

Theme 1 – Pull factor: Financial burdens. The first major pull theme that emerged from the data was financial burdens. Students shared their perceptions of the demands placed on both their families and themselves to survive financially.

Green focus groups. Students in the two green groups referenced finances and familial obligations 20 times during the focus groups. Overwhelmingly, green group respondents expressed concern that their families' financial burdens had an influence on their school success. These burdens affected their school lives due to the demands of working, caring for siblings, and engaging in adult-like activities while still trying to maintain the life of a high school student. Many of these students shared that their parents worried about how to pay the rent and keep food on the table. These worries afforded the parents little time for homework or school support.

Several students commented on the unskilled, low-paying jobs that their parents held and noted how hard they had to work for little pay. For example, Jose shared, "Some people only work for rent, and kids don't get a lot because their parents have to make sure that we can sleep somewhere." Another student agreed with this characterization and stated, "Some parents work for low wages, and sometimes that's not enough to support everything." This sentiment was also echoed by Juan, who shared that "some parents even get two or three jobs just to make their kids have a better future." Similarly, Pedro said that "other kids drop out because their parents are having so much issues with money…yeah, so you'd rather work…to help them out."

The respondents also shared that their parents worked to send money to their home country. Jorge shared his father's experience: "My grandpa beat my father almost every day, but yet my dad still sends him 100 dollars every time he can. He says though he hit him more times than he can count, he still cared about him." Enrique summed up

the hardships of his family's financial burdens and obligations, and those of Latino families as whole, with the following statement:

> Some parents, some people...or other countries…come to this country just to work, like construction and all that, right? Especially Hispanics…Because a lot of people, like immigrants, come just to go for what they have. If you have a job, they'll do it. Because they come here just to make money and send it.

Josue and Erik explained that the financial burdens faced by their family obligations affected their school lives. They both stated that having to care for and babysit younger siblings was a way of life for many students. Josue commented, "So, basically, having the siblings takes away from home life, because your parents always have to work to pay for them." Erik's shared, "I think children get in the way because if they're younger, your parents, since they're working…you would have to help out the younger sibling, which would get in the way of your work."

Red and mixed groups. Based on the transcripts, no references or significant data was provided by these two groups for this theme.

Theme 2 - Pull factor: Clashing cultures. The data revealed that students identified the divide between the cultural differences in America and their home countries as a key factor in the engagement of both them and their parents. The students shared that it is like walking a tightrope and trying to stay upright. They don't want to lose their cultural identity but understand that they must adapt to the America ways in order to succeed in school. Many expressed that their parents do not understand this balancing

act. In terms of factors pulling a student in or out of school, ten indicators were identified based on analyses of the frequency of use of the category across each of the groups.

Green focus groups. During discussions of how parents contributed to their school success, many respondents shared that their parents were unable to navigate the educational system, communicate with the school, or help with homework because of cultural and language barriers. As [student] stated, "I don't think it's [that] they don't understand; it's more of a cultural or communicational divide." The participants also shared that their parents did not understand the demands of school and the need for them to focus on their academics. The students explained that parents believed that family responsibilities were a top priority, and that homework and school projects came second. [Student] gave the following example: "[At] home, you gotta' take care of your family, or if your dad is not in the country, you gotta' take care of the family. And so, they drop out to get the jobs."

Ten green group participants claimed that their parents simply did not understand their lives and the pressures that they experienced. Julio, for example, noted that the responsibilities given to him by his parents often interfered with his ability to complete school work. He shared the following:

> [You] are doing your work, but sometimes you can't finish it because you're busy doing stuff around the house because your mom is either taking care of the kids or doing something else that's important. And they blame you for not finishing your work, even though you're always working around the house, helping, to keep everything in check.

Several students noted their parents' inability to understand the demands of school assignments and projects. Miguel explained the following:

> Like, you try to tell them (my parents), "Oh, the reason I didn't do this homework is because I was busy doing this other project, which was more important"; and then they just end up saying, "No, you should have had the time to do both of them."

Similarly, Fabio discussed his communication with his parents, stating, "Yeah, because let's say, 'Look, mom…' or I'll be like, 'Look mom, I don't understand this. I'm failing. I don't get it.' They'll be like, 'No, you just don't want to do your work.' It's like, 'No.'"

While students shared the dilemmas that they faced in getting their parents to understand the demands in America's schools, they also consistently expressed the cultural and communication divide as a barrier faced by their parents. Arturo relayed this common issue by saying "I kinda say it's like...They're Hispanics all by-heart, you could say. They were raised by Hispanics, [and] they were always around Hispanics; but us, we're Hispanics raised in America. We think differently than they do." Juan concurred and shared, "Though we [were] raised by them, we're also around people who think like us. Like, they live the American life, but at home, they live the Hispanic life."

Several of the students discussed the need for better communication between parents and teachers. Juan, for example, stated the following:

> And that could also help our parents communicate better with our teachers, so that they can understand more about the issues that we might have, or what benefits

> that we could have for the school…because parents might think that school is easy, but they don't know the struggle we go through.

Adieu also noted the following:

> [And] it also might help out with…The parents might get to know the teacher, and if we're trying to explain to our parents, "Oh, this teacher's like this and that," and some parents say, "No, that's not an excuse," they might understand what…how…why we feel [the way we do] about that teacher.

The students' sentiments about the relationship between school, life, and home indicated that family came first and took precedence over school work. In some instances, students shared that they were unable to attend to their school work because they were serving as care providers for their siblings. The respondents acknowledge the irony in the fact that while their parents' shared the students' disappointment in their lack of studying, they added to the students' inability to study by overburdening them with chores and babysitting that took precedence over their school work. Juan shared that "You're actually doing something." Another student chimed in, "[We] do the most around the house, [to] keep the family together all the time."

Red and mixed focus groups. The red and mixed focus groups did not provide examples that addressed barriers or issues related to families or communication between parents and schools. However, when the researcher asked participants "Do your parents help you in school?" they nodded their heads affirmatively and shared monosyllabic responses such as "okay" and "yeah" when probed about the level of school support from their parents.

Theme 3 – Pull factor: Negative peer pressure and influence. The themes that emerged under this category included (a) bullying, (b) drugs and violence and, (c) fighting and classroom disruption. The respondents referenced the influence that peers can have on their disengagement from school a total of 34 times during the focus group discussions, including 18 references from the green groups, nine from the red group, and seven from the mixed group. This theme received the highest number of references for pull factors across the three groups.

Specifically, when discussing the factors that interfere with their success in school, the respondents reported that cyberbullying, in particular, eroded the academic environment and kept the children from feeling safe and secure. The students explained that cyberbullying impeded the learning process and had damaging effects on students' attitudes and self-esteem. Additionally, students noted that the threat of actual physical altercations had an influence on their attitudes towards school. They explained that conflicts between groups of friends could negatively affect their engagement in school.

Five red students, three green students, and three mixed group students also explained that drugs had a negative effect on student engagement and students' decision to drop out of school. They shared that many students left school for "trapping," or selling drugs and added that if two groups of friends did not like each other because of neighborhood "trapping"; it would often end in a "beef" or altercation. In all three groups, participants identified class disruption and skipping class as negative factors that influenced students' success. They attributed both issues to the influence of their peers.

Green focus groups. Juan and three other students shared that their relationships with peers was "alright, like, it depends...depends if you got beef…if you don't." They discussed fighting and people beefing as negative factors that affected the school and student success. Enrique summed up the negative peer influences in school with one word: "Drama."

Students in the green group identified bullying that occurred among their peers as a negative distraction in school. Julio shared that if a student tried to do the right thing, he was met with negative reactions and comments:

> [They] just try to bother you just by the way you look. Like, they think, "Oh he's a geek, so let's just bother him, just to mess with him." Or like, "Oh he's got good stuff, let's check it, see if we can get something off of it."

Moreover, Enrique spoke about the peer pressure to hang with the right group. He explained, "[If] one of your friends isn't friends with another friend…So, they basically tell you have to choose between being friends with…one of them…That, we've been seeing a lot…so many times." His comment received affirmative feedback from everyone in the group via head nods or verbal agreement.

Several students shared that the transition from eighth to ninth grade brought another layer of peer pressure. Juan stated, "Everybody shows their true colors...in high school. They show who they are." Similarly, Erik expressed, "In eighth grade you've got all your friends, but when you come to ninth grade [it] just…[starts] to fade away."

When the researcher asked the participants why some of their friends, or the students they knew, dropped out of school, several of the students recounted stories of the

lure of the streets. Angel, for example, explained, "[Some] people are not gonna take the opportunity [to stay in school and finish], because they would rather be in the streets." Likewise, Josue shared that the perceived fast money associated with drugs drew some students away from school. He commented, "Technically trapping…That means you stay out and do stuff for money…illegal [selling drugs and some defined trapping as stealing from others, including other drug sellers]." Jorge agreed with Josue, but added that some students leave school and deal drugs because of economic reasons: "[Some] people are going through some issues that they turn out going to drugs, and then they get us to drugs."

Despite their experiences with peer pressure, most of the green group students stated that they were rarely affected by it and tended to simply ignore any negative influences. Leonardo, for example, stated, "Okay. I would say that I really don't take peer pressure seriously. When I don't like doing something, I say, 'No.' And when I say, 'No,' it just means no. No one can convince me otherwise." In a similar fashion, Pablo shared the following:

> Like me, I don't follow peer pressure. Like some guys ask me, "Hey, do you wanna smoke some weed?" And I say, "No." And then ... But others it's different, cause some, they follow the peer pressure and that's what caused them to start doing ... It's a cycle. Someone starts and then that person starts and then they hook someone else up.

***Red focus groups*.** Much like the green group, red group students identified negative peer pressure and the lure of the streets as one of the main reasons that students

they knew dropped out of school. The red group students were much more expressive regarding this topic than were the green group participants, and had more to say about this issue than all of the other themes except teacher pedagogical approaches. Almost all participants in the red group commented about or nodded their agreement to a response related to this topic. Tomas, for example, remarked, "Kids…bad influence kids…they influence you to do drugs and stuff that you're not supposed to do." Angel touched on this negative influence by saying, "And they get you in the wrong path; they tell you to do drugs and all that, and then you're gonna' get attracted to the drugs, keep on doing them, and you're not gonna' be focused on school." Carlos also discussed his experiences with students who try to convince their peers to try drugs, "[They say] that [it's] not that bad, and that it won't harm you. It actually does. It affects the way you do in school and it effects what you do at home."

Unlike, students in the green group, who shared their resolve and ability to ignore the negative pressures of their peers, students in the red group were notably affected by the influence of their peers. Additionally, while the green group identified negative peer influences from the vantage point of drugs, the streets, and bullying; students in the red group also commented on classroom disruptions and distractions. They shared that these occurrences could ultimately lead to poor academic performance and disengagement. Javier declared, "Students interrupt the class…some students interrupt the class…talking back to the teacher, yelling for no reason."

Mixed focus group. The mixed focus group participants also identified the classroom disruption of their peers as a factor that negatively affected their success in

school. Alonso, for example, shared his frustrations with "some classmates [they interrupt the teacher and class by talking out or disrespecting the teacher]." Dante added that "some classmates keep you from being successful." Three other students from the group noted their concerns about their peers' interruption of class by stating, "They be distracting you, when you're doing your work," "[They] interrupt the class," and "[They stop] teachers from teaching."

While they did mention the use of drugs as a negative peer influence, the mixed group students shared fewer references than did their green and red peers. Javier, however, did note, "If [students] live in a bad community, they might follow in the footsteps of others…if they're in a gang, you might also join the same gang...Or selling drugs…You might also sell drugs. Like that."

Unlike the green and red focus groups, the mixed group participants identified class cutting and skipping school as a negative peer influence factor. They equated skipping school with drug use and smoking, and noted it as a key reason that some students do not pass their classes. Eduardo shared his insight on students skipping class: "A lot of people skipping classes—Go to more than one lunch, leave the building, go to McDonald's." He further shared that some students are lured to skip with their friends: "Your friends…maybe some just skip with them, go outside so you don't do your work. Then, you [mess] up."

Theme 4 – Pull factor: Negative personal outlook. This theme was prevalent among the green student groups, and it seemed to cause them notable angst. Despite its impact on the green group, however, the topic did not enter into the researcher's

discussions with the students in the red or mixed groups, as they did not share any insights into their personal outlook of their future.

Green focus groups. Educational practitioners are often accused of adopting a deficit thinking paradigm, and this study revealed that many of the participants have internalized a grim depiction of their future. The respondents in the green group made 12 references to having a negative personal outlook. It was alarming to hear from 14-year-old students a sense of hopefulness about their future. Throughout the focus group sessions, the green students were very contemplative about their home and school life. This tone was in great contrast to the otherwise positive and upbeat manner with which they shared their perceptions about future prospects for Latino males.

Many green group respondents engaged in negative self-talk about their future and their academic choices. They expressed concern about their ability to make a good life for themselves if they chose to stay in school. Eduardo, for example, shared the following:

> Yeah, because there's always that one like ... You always think about, "Oh, how am I going to do this for my parents if I want them to live better?" But like ... some people think that school is just wasting your time. That's like, you graduate ... Okay, let's say you graduate out of here. You're gonna be a manager of Taco Bell at the end of the day. You drop out, you're still gonna work for Taco Bell. So, at the end of the day you always lose.

Fabio had a similar view of the lack of career opportunities post-graduation. He expressed the following:

> Some Hispanic people I know…My choreographer that taught me how to [dance], he said that he graduated… but at the end of the day, he still worked at Taco Bell. Like, it depends. You'll get a good life if you go to college. If you got money to go to college, you'll get a good life. But if you don't got that money, at the end of the day, you're always gonna' work in a little restaurant or something.

The thought of completing both their high school and college education was a distant and uncomfortable thought for many students. They expressed their concern about the demands of high school and college. Many of the students had negative reactions to the thought of several more years of school. Carlos shared, "I mean, like, life isn't [easy]. When you're in school, and you're sitting in that desk for over 14 years; and then once you graduate, and then you go to college, you sit another eight years." Adieu declared the following:

> Alright, how many years is it from pre-K, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth? That's six years. Alright, we leave six years to … becomes seven, eight, that's two more years. Then we stay here for four more years; and if we try to be in college, that's gonna be… what…four more years.

Angel echoed this sentiment when he vehemently shared, "[Basically], your whole life is about school, and then, once you go to work, you sit on a desk for like another 25."

Several green students commented on the financial costs of college that deter many students from pursuing this path after graduation. Jose summed their views up perfectly when he lamented, "[College] is expensive." Two other students vocally agreed

with this comment. Alberto added, “Yeah, and not everybody got the money to pay that, and then once you go to a bank and want a loan, you end up being in a debt.”

Jorge contributed the most startling comment in this category. While he is a member of the green focus group and was identified as low risk at the start of his ninth grade year, he made the following statement: “As soon as third quarter hits ninth graders, it's gonna start to sink in that they're in high school now. Few years from now, it's either college, work, or just plain give up.” While acknowledging that at this juncture of their ninth grade year is critical, the self-defeating attitude he identified in some ninth graders students speaks volumes. Without the intrinsic motivation and drive to persist and believe in themselves, many students will falter and ultimately fail ninth grade and begin the downward school engagement spiral.

Red and mixed groups. As indicated earlier, none of the students in the red or mixed groups made statements that could be categorized under this theme.

Theme 5 – Push factor: School pedagogical and support issues. All of the focus groups made some reference to their perception of the lack of support and the pedagogical practices of educators. This emerging theme reflected the highest number of references for the green (n=30), red (n=11), and mixed (n=4) focus groups. Many respondents across all groups mentioned their disapproval of teachers, but the green group was more vocal about their displeasure with teachers’ behavior and teaching practices than were the red and mixed focus groups.

Green focus groups. When asked if they liked school, a number of the respondents from the green groups responded negatively. When the researcher followed

up by inquiring about what they disliked about school, five students responded quickly and succinctly, “The teachers.” Carlos expounded on the responses of his peers by sharing his concern about “some of the teachers' teaching styles [teachers pace and lack of use of hands-on or varied styles to engage individual students].” Leonardo expressed his frustration with the pedagogical approaches of his teachers, stating, “Some teachers, just like, their teaching style sometimes benefits you… Like, you're trying to learn, but some styles don't teach you.” Juan agreed and added, “When you want a different type of explanation, they don't explain it right…or in some way you could understand.”

Many of the green participants shared that they had experienced a dismissive and non-supportive reaction to questions from some of their teachers. Angel lamented, “Some teachers just, sometimes, don't care about the students. So, they don't put enough effort into the teaching.” Jose concurred and added, “They don't support the [students].” Jorge elaborated with the following explanation:

> Some teachers just be like, “Okay, here's the work, and then do whatever we did yesterday;” and then they just give you a sheet of paper, and then you've gotta’ figure out…they expect us to know…expect us to remember.

Fabio eloquently summed up his perception of the teacher’s role in student disengagement by stating, “If you didn't show us the right way, we're not gonna’ understand what you gave us; or you just gonna’ be there looking at the paper like nothing? When that happens, I'd rather fall asleep.”

The students in the green focus group also raised a concern about their yearning for interventions and multiple opportunities for success, as well as the need for extra

credit to support students. In addition to sharing their displeasure with teaching practices, students suggested ways that teachers could provide better academic support for them through understanding, motivation, and encouragement. Multiple students noted the need for teachers to provide multiple pathways to academic success through extra credit opportunities. Erik explained, "Yeah, because some teachers, they don't really like giving extra credit. They just say, 'If you don't do the work in class, who is to say you're gonna' do it at home?" When asked about how teachers can help students, three other students simply said, "Extra credit ..."

During a discussion of supports that would help keep students in school, the students expressed a desire for engaging classes and additional support from teachers. Javier responded, "Support, motivation, and encouragement…" Juan suggested the following ideas for providing additional classroom support:

> Maybe get some assistant teachers…I think is what it's called. Like, how we can have one teacher over here focused on some group of students and then we'll have another one not just like, time-to-time focusing on a few and then the others don't get it at all.

Humorously, Julio simply said, "Find good teachers."

The researcher asked the students to identify at least one adult with whom each student had fostered an in-school relationship. Alarmingly, only nine of the 29 participants across the five focus groups had an identified caring relationship with an adult at their school. These same nine, all green students, were the only respondents that had interacted with their guidance counselor. While Josue was enthusiastic throughout

the focus group session, he shared his frustration with the lack of relationships he had with his teachers and the perceived lack of understanding he experienced with them. He shared that while some of the teachers at the school were foreign born, their experiences differed from those of the students. He provided the following explanation:

> [Some] teachers, they had it good. They came from other countries, they went straight to college because of what they did; but us, some of us, we work for our parents…we work with our parents so that we can help them out.

Enrique concurred stating, "They don't know the struggle we're going through."

Red focus groups. The teacher's influence on student engagement was also a common topic among the red students. They shared concerns similar to those of their green group peers. When asked about what they disliked about school, the red group students relayed that they liked kids and adults sometimes. They contended that in some instances, they were wrongly accused by their teachers for inappropriate behaviors. Gabriel asserted, "They be tripping. Sometimes, when they think you did something, and you didn't, they don't try to find the actual person that did it [and you get in trouble]."

The respondents also shared that they did not have enough time during instruction to work at a comfortable pace. Emmanuel, for example, explained the following:

> You aren't able to work at your own pace, 'cause everyone has their own pace in learning; and I don't think that's cool that they just make us...not make us, but are obligated to do this at a certain time…yeah.

The students in the red group proclaimed that they found it frustrating to share their concerns about the pace of work with adults because they felt that their comments were rarely understood or taken seriously. Pablo declared the following:

> Why talk to an adult when you can talk to one of your family members? Like, why talk to an adult from school when you can talk to family members. I'm pretty sure your family members will understand more than the adults that you barely talk to.

The students also had broad suggestions for improving the school curriculum. When the researcher asked the students to share their perceptions about their school work, many of them responded that the curriculum could be enhanced to be more interesting. Pedro explained the following:

> Yes, make [the curriculum] more interesting; because when we get bored [with] learning, we don't pay attention. When we don't pay attention, we don't learn a thing. When we don't learn, we don't pass; and by making it more interesting…probably more exciting…it makes us want to learn even more and probably will help us graduate fast.

The students also provided suggestions for improving classroom instruction. Mario for example, stated that instruction could be improved if teachers would "show us a lot of videos of what they're talking about," and Tomas added that he would like there to be "less textbook work." Javier further shared that having "more of a choice of how we're gonna learn things" would enhance their learning experience.

Mixed focus group. When asked what they disliked about school, the mixed focus group participants responded with disdain for some of their teachers and commented that they felt pressured into learning. Alonso, for example, said that "stuff that we don't know yet, and expect us to learn fast [inability of teachers to assess prior knowledge, individualize, make connections and pace lessons]." Eduardo also noted a distinct difference between the pedagogy of the teachers in classrooms where he experienced success and that of teachers in classrooms where he struggled. He shared the following thoughts:

> If you're in a class where you look forward to going to the class, and you feel like you're successful in the class; what does that teacher do, compared to another teacher that you don't like to go to the class? What does that teacher do?

Additionally, students expressed their confusion over the fact that some teachers offered more latitude in grading than did others. Santiago provided the following example:

> If you have a family emergency or something, and you had to turn in a project; one teacher would give you an extra day, and another teacher would say that you couldn't do it anymore…that you get a zero.

When asked what teachers could do to help at school, the students stated that they should provide more opportunities [for success in class and to engage with assignments through various methods] and could as Eduardo shared "be more understanding [of student's background, home life and challenges]."

Theme 6 – Push factor: School schedule is not ideal. Eleven survey respondents from the green focus groups and two from the red focus groups commented that the school schedule and the time spent in block scheduling classes was not ideal for learning. The students shared that unless teachers provided interesting activities and various methods to learn; classes were boring, and many students opted to skip, which results in failure.

Green focus group. The students in the green group had several suggestions about how the school schedule could be adjusted. Angel, for example, emphatically suggested shorter blocks of time in class: "[If] you're not really interested in the class, and that class is one of your longest…so it's not even halfway finished through the class, and you just don't even wanna' do the work anymore." Jorge also noted that schools should alter dismissal times according to the times of sunrise and sunset. As Erik explained, "It gets dark around five." [students have to work, babysit for younger siblings and concerns about walking in their "bad" neighborhood]. Josue added, "Well, in the winter, but during the summer it gets dark around seven."

Students also expressed concerns about conflicts with assignments and testing schedules. Dante explained "[You] can have a test the same day each period, and so we get confused because we have a lot of tests to do." Likewise, Carlos shared, "Imagine you have a test in one period, and then you've got more tests in the other ones; and you're supposed to remember everything in your head in each period for [those tests]."

Red focus group. Only two students in the red group shared a concern about the timing of the school day or the length of class time. Alonso simply said, "Hours,"

meaning [class periods are too long]. Javier summed up his concern about time in five words, "The time I wake up." Javier's issue was [school starts too early for teenagers especially when they have to work or provide childcare for working parents along with homework].

Mixed focus group. The students in the mixed focus group did not provide any responses that were relevant to this theme.

Theme 7 –Supportive pull factor: Family. As previously noted, supportive pull factors exist both inside and outside of the school building and, in effect, "pull" students toward high school completion. When asked about the ways that their home environment encouraged their school success, the respondents made 29 references to the importance of family support. The students in the green focus groups made the largest number of references (n=21) to this theme.

Green focus groups. The green group students consistently reported that the support they received from their family encouraged them to stay in school. The students' responses varied when asked about the home factors that helped them to be successful in school. Many students indicated that their parents were supportive. Others noted that their parents' ability to speak English, as well as their proficiency in various subjects, was helpful.

Students also noted the value of the motivational support that their families provided. Juan, for example, spoke about the role that his grandmother played in supporting his school engagement. He shared, "My grandma always tells me, 'Education

is gonna' take you somewhere in life.' That's why I'm here. If it wasn't, I would not be."

Jorge shared that his family provided similar supports:

> They be like, "Look, we want you to be somebody in life. You don't wanna' be like me. You don't wanna' be stuck like me, not doing, not speaking, not even know how to write, or not even how to do your own signature. That's why you should stay in school and learn."

Juan spoke about the supportive role that his father played in his school life:

> Because, well, specifically for my father, he's always telling me, "You should take advantage of what you have in school because if they allowed me to take it advantage of that, I would take it like this, no matter how, I could come late, I could come early from work and come to school and learn just to get the education that you get.

Similarly, Josue movingly shared, "My motivation is really just my sister, because I don't want her living like me most of her life…in an apartment, just not really able to celebrate her birthday…just small cake."

While many of the students' shared reports of receiving encouragement from their families, they also spoke about the language barriers that interfered with their parents' ability to provide support. Fabio, for example, stated, "[You] have parents that some of them don't even know how to write, speak, or like, not even know how to calculate…" Julio also shared the following comment about the language barriers that his mother experienced:

> My mom doesn't know how to speak English. She understands it, but she don't know how to read or write. So, that's the struggle. You don't want your parents to be like that, but at the end of the day, they want you to be better.

Respondents also shared that their parents' work schedules prohibited them from providing help. Arturo explained the following:

> Sometimes your parents aren't there because they're working. It's just aunts or uncles [who] are there just to help you blow out your birthday candles. I wanna' get a good enough job so...well, me being Latino, when it comes to a Quinceanera, it's something big... something amazing. So, that [if I have a daughter], she can realize that I actually stopped and stayed in school so that she could have a good life...

These discussions of support provided by family were, at times, in stark contrast to the conflicts that students experienced trying to balance family and school obligations. As Leonardo aptly shared, "Family's always first." This comment encapsulated the respondents' comments about their families, and represents both the tendency to support and the challenges provided about the importance of school espoused by their parents.

Red focus groups. The students in the red focus groups echoed the sentiments of the green students when asked about home factors that helped them to be successful in school. Alonso, for example, declared, "Support from my family, I guess…Like, they want us to succeed, and we try. Sometimes, we're just so stressed out from having [to work, babysit, demands of school work, pressure from peers and the community]." He also shared, "[They're] pushing us to go the right way…but not the wrong way."

Mixed focus group. Like the red students, the mixed focus group shared similar perspectives as those presented by the green students. Javier, for example, said, "[My parents tell me], 'You should go to school every day, and do what you have to do.' That's why it's cool. They say [to] be better than them." Donte shared his own experience with the motivation that his family provides:

> They tell me all the stories about how my father dropped out, and since then his family is poor… helping him out. I don't want to go through all that rough times he did. I want to be better than him, get a lot of money, support my family, do good things for them, and them happy. They can continue the process even better than how I did, so they can have a better life, better for their children.

Theme 8 –Supportive pull factor: Friends. Several of the respondents also noted that friends could serve as a supportive factor that helped them to stay in school. The participants from the green group were most articulate about the ways in which their friends and peers supported them in their efforts to achieve academic success.

Green focus groups. The students in the green group shared a number of thoughts and perspectives about the role that their friends played in helping them to be successful in school. Jorge for example, stated, "They got your back," and Javier commented, "[They help] you study for tests that you need so you can get your grades up." Erik also noted that his peers helped to ease his confusion during class instruction, stating "[Whenever] you're in the middle of class, and you need help understanding something, your friends can help you understand what you need to know." Two of the participants, Diego and Carlos, shared that the scope of their friendship circle was important. Erik

asserted, "[Sometimes] you've gotta' keep your circle small," and Josue added, "[Small circles of friends] can be very supportive."

Red focus groups. Two of the red students stated that their friends played a critical role in their academic performance. Tomas shared "My friends tell me not to skip, go to class." Similarly, Daniel commented "Sometimes they tell me good things about school that make me think, I need to do the right thing." Like the students in the green group, both students commented that friends were important.

Mixed focus group. The mixed shared similar sentiments about their friend groups. Javier commented, "Me and my friends are very competitive about everything and anything, so whoever does better is the best…They tell me to stay in school…do our work." Alonso also stated, "If they understand something, they can help you understand it even better."

Summary of Focus Group Comparisons

The data revealed parallel responses between the five focus groups for the eight themes for push, pull, and supportive pull factors. The participants in each group seemed to be aware of the impact that pull factors, specifically family obligations, peers, drugs and the streets had on their academic performance. While there were parallel responses across the green, red, and mixed groups for family and negative peer influences, only green group participants identified negative personal outlook, aspirations and generational clashes as push factors that had dire consequences on their academic achievement. The students were particularly intuitive about the push factors that they perceived to be impediments to their school engagement. Respondents across all three

groups identified the role of teachers and their classroom experience as the biggest obstacle to their school success.

It was apparent from the data that student in the green, red, and mixed group identified their family as a supportive pull factor. Participants also identified friends as an encouraging factor in school.

Figure 4 shows the 100 most common words used amongst student in their responses to the twelve questions posed to each of the five focus groups. Understandably, given the topic of the focus groups, school was the most frequently mentioned word. Given the age range, and the content of the questions, it is not surprising that some of the other frequently mentioned words—teachers, parents, relationships, family, classes, and drugs—mirrored the eight emerging themes. Words like Latino and male were also frequently used.

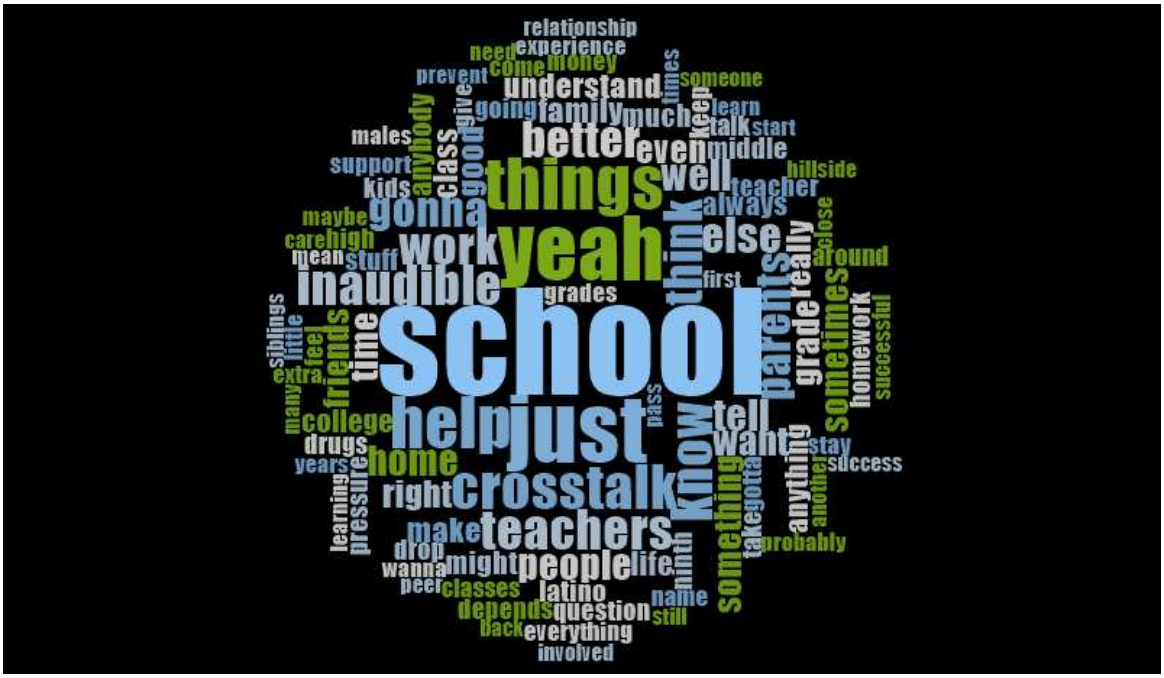

Figure 4. *Word Cloud: 100 Most Used Words in the Dataset*

Discussion

The key findings of this study provide greater insight into the perceptions of ninth grade Latino male students on factors that impact their school engagement. The previous section provided details of the emerging themes evident in the collected data and the distinctions between the perceptions of red, green, and mixed group students. The responses of the 29 study participants revealed eight emergent themes: four pull out (external); two push out (internal) and two supportive (internal or external) factors, although the students in some groups addressed some of the themes more frequently than others, due perhaps to the higher engagement, discussed earlier, in the green groups of students.

The prevailing theme addressed by each of the focus groups was the powerful effect of teaching and classroom practices, rigor and relationships. Comments about the key role that relationships played in students' academic outcomes were evident in students' responses about teachers, family, and friends. Overall, green students provided a greater degree of details about this topic area than did their red and mixed group peers.

Key Finding # 1: School and teacher pedagogy, relationships and structure. As noted earlier, push factors are internal influences that negatively affect students' decisions to stay in school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Garcia-Reid & Peterson, 2005). Students overwhelmingly expressed concern about school-related push factors, particularly school structure, instruction, and relationships with teachers. The instructional programs and student-teacher relationships are the core and foundation of district and school programs. Challenges in these two areas produced angst and negative

feelings for the Latino male respondents, and according to Behnke, Gonzalez and Coz (2010), are likely common themes that might be found across this demographic age group.

The first key push out finding is that students across all five focus groups viewed the role of the teacher and school structure as the biggest push factors that affected their level of school engagement. The respondents overwhelmingly expressed dissatisfaction and concern about teacher practice. While classroom engagement is a common challenge, it is quite notable that students across all three groups identified teacher practice and insufficient support from teachers as the greatest impediments to their engagement.

Participants also noted a lack of cultural awareness and understanding among their teachers as an added concern. Researchers have found that schools often look at Latino male students through a deficit thinking lens. Valencia (1997), for example, stated that a deficit thinking is often rooted in racial and class bias, and internal policies and practices can support the negative thinking about the potential trajectory and educational attainment of minority and low-income students. Student responses and the emergent themes from the present study paint a clear picture that interactions with teachers and school structure serve as key push factors and have a significant impact on their school engagement and completion, regardless of whether they have been identified as red (high-risk) or green (low-risk).

The extant literature, along with the findings from the present study, supports the notion that a need exists to rethink teacher practices and expectations in the education of Latino male students. The findings from the current inquiry aligned, to some degree, with

other reported studies and confirmed that some of the factors are universally expressed by students, specifically Latino students. Garcia-Reid, Reid, and Peterson (2005) and Behnke, Gonzalez, and Cox (2010), for example, suggested that teacher support was directly related to school engagement; and that Latino youth who perceived more positive attitudes and behaviors from teachers tended to have higher school engagement scores. When the reverse occurred, students disengaged from school and were at risk of dropping out. Additionally, Bridgeland et al. (2006) conducted focus groups with minority students who left school prior to completion. One of the school-related factors that the respondents identified was their dislike of school and their lack of engagement. Rumberger (2011) added that school policies, school structure, and course offerings often influenced students' decision to leave school.

Key Finding # 2: The role of the Latino/a family. The second key finding was the dichotomous role that the families of these students played on their academic engagement and performance. Across the five focus groups, the students consistently stressed that their families served as both a pull out and a supportive factor.

Family as a pull out factor. A number of respondents shared that their families served as an obstacle to their ability to place appropriate focus on their school work and academic responsibilities. Students (particularly those in the green groups), for example, stated that they felt the need to share in the financial issues and burdens of their families, which often resulted in the students having to work to help their parents pay rent or send money to their home country. Students also referenced their need to babysit and care for siblings so that parents could work. While they expressed understanding that their parents

were trying to make a better for them in America, they also shared frustration with the responsibilities and financial burdens that they shouldered that left them little time to act like a teenager. They lamented the fact that they were rarely able to participate in extracurricular activities or engage in sports because of the need to work afterschool. They also noted their desire to have nice things like other students, and their frustration when they were stymied by their family's limited financial resources. Although some students worked or knew peers that worked, the income earned was rarely their own, as they used it to support the family.

Family as a support factor. Interestingly, while the students admitted that family often served as a barrier to their academic achievement, they also discussed the many ways that their families served as a source of support. Rumberger (2011) stated that the family is one of the most important contributors to students' success in school. In Latino families, *familism or familisimo* is characterized by strong interpersonal relationships, which include not only the parents but also immediate family members like aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, god-parents, and close friends who live in close proximity (Allen, 2008). Family expectations and family engagement can both support or hinder Latino students.

Ultimately, in spite of the cultural and language barriers (which will be discussed in a later section), students shared that their families encouraged them to complete school as a means to achieving greater opportunities and the American Dream. Additionally, several shared that their parents expressed regrets about having dropped out of high

school themselves and wanted to make sure their children understood the consequences, financial and otherwise.

Students in this study noted feeling a sense of belonging in their families and communities. While students in the green group provided 21 responses related to the supportive role of their family, red and mixed group students also identified this theme as a strong supportive pull factor that positively affected their school engagement and desire to remain in school. The participants stated that they received this validation and support from parents and extended family members. This finding aligns a study by Harper (2012), who found that students believed that strong cultural influences, extended family members, and neighbors served as supportive factors that kept them in school. Similarly, Perez et al. (2009), in her study of school completion supports for Latino students, concluded that despite risk factors like social marginalization and legal status, Latino students identified supportive parents as a key factor in their academic success.

Key Finding # 3: The role of peers. The third key finding related to the issue of peer pressure. The data revealed that peers could have both a positive and negative affect on student performance.

Peers as pull factors. Students across the green, red, and mixed groups identified bullying, fighting, drugs, and the lure of the streets as reasons many students disengage and leave school prior to completion; all of these factors are aligned with peer pressure and peer influences. Students also noted the threat of or actual physical altercations as an influence on students' attitudes towards school. They explained that such conflicts, or beefs, between groups of friends could negatively affect students' engagement in school.

While researchers like Conchas and Vigil (2012) have found that gang activity affects Latino students' school completion, specifically that of males, at an alarming rate; however, the respondents did not explicitly use the word gangs. They did, however, reference aggressive or bullying acts directed against them or their friends. As shared by the students, the increased use of social media makes this bullying easier and the perpetrators can hide behind the computer.

Students also expressed their concern with the enticement of earning fast money through the sale of drugs. They shared that some students saw selling drugs as common way of earning a living in their communities. Students also shared that many students feel bullied and pressured to engage in illegal activities either because of peers and community members or because they saw it as an alternative to achieving the American dream that did not involve years of schooling.

While all three groups discussed the aforementioned issues as negative peer influences, only the red group identified classroom disruption by peers as a pull out factor. The red students entered ninth grade at high risk of non-completion, based on the EWIR variables. Often students are placed in classes with like peers and in classes that are less challenging. This can lead to less engagement and more occurrences of classroom disruptions and time off task. Sometimes students see the disruptions as an escape from an assignment that might pose difficulty because of skill deficit. At other times, it is seen as a negative influence that they either join in or disengage because of frustrations. Also, engagement in class may have been a struggle for them in middle

school, which would have resulted in low grade point averages, course failure, and poor assessment scores.

Key Finding #4: Negative personal outlook (push and pull factor). While negative personal outlook was only identified by green students, this push out theme is directly related to the influence of peers, teachers and students' families. Green students enter ninth grade with the prerequisite academic, attendance and behavioral scores for a successful transition to ninth grade and the predictive variables to complete this grade successfully. Passing this gateway year starts students on the path to graduation. Surprisingly, 18 responses reflected some of the students' perceived sense of hopelessness about their postsecondary options, a lack of trust in what the future holds for them, and their feelings of despair regarding future college and/or employment opportunities. These results were disheartening based on the upward track that schools see for this group of students. Most schools provide very little transitional support from eighth to ninth grade based on the students' background data. The variance in schools' level of support and their perceptions bares further review and discussion.

Key Finding #5: Cultural barriers (push factor). The respondents expressed the challenge that they faced, as Latino students, in having to walk the line between two worlds—that of traditional American society and their first-generation parents who still embraced the cultural values of their home country. While only the green students mentioned this challenge, this theme was also evident in Harper and Williams (2014), who studied the effect of engaged parents on two on historically underserved populations—Black and Latino male students. Their findings suggested that families'

efforts to engage in their students' educational experience—by communicating high expectations, limiting unstructured time, and emphasizing their home language and culture—could lead to better outcomes for these students; however, the researchers also found that some parents did not understand how to communicate with the school or navigate through the school structure.

In the present study, participants shared their frustration with and the anxiety about their parents' inability to communicate with teachers, help with school assignments, or understand the demands of school. Students also shared the perception that some of their teachers lacked an understanding of their culture and the struggles the students faced when trying to bridge two worlds. The students noted that the view that the divide had widened since the election of President Donald Trump. Since Trump was elected, they found that their parents were more apprehension and distrustful of the "system." Harper and Williams (2014) asserted that schools could foster parent engagement—and subsequently, student retention—by fostering a welcoming environment for students and parents from diverse backgrounds and by placing a particular focus on fostering connections with parents.

Summary. The findings of this study provide greater insight into the perceptions of ninth grade Latino male students on factors that affect their school engagement. The data indicate that supportive relationships from school personnel, family members, and friends are the major factors that play a significant role in the academic success of Latino male students. The findings also indicate that schools must examine pedagogical practices and make changes as necessary that will help teachers to engage this subgroup

of students. Understanding how to teach these students and how to connect with them must be a priority for school and district staff. Addressing these gaps knowledge will potentially result in increased school engagement and school completion rates for Latino male students.

While the literature suggests that key push out factors for Latino males are discipline and attendance, the respondents in the present study made minimal references to both of these factors. Additionally, students made few explicit references to gang recruitment or behavior, and only one participant identified teen pregnancy as a pull out factor. Based upon the participants' responses and perceptions, the work must start in the school.

The results of this study can help educators design strategies that will lead to the effective engagement of Latino male students. The results of this study are relevant to teachers, administrators, and district leaders. As the Latino population increases in the district, educators need to be concerned about the ninth grade success and school completion rates of this subgroup. To this end, the findings also show that District X must fortify its mission to support these extraordinary young men.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when evaluating the generalizability of the results from this study. According to Creswell (2007) when conducting focus groups, there is always a possibility that one person might dominate the group, or that there might be quiet or reserved students who do not want to express their thoughts and opinions. Some of the red students (at risk), in both the red and mixed focus groups, were

somewhat reluctant to speak in the group setting. While conducting this study, the researcher sought to address both of these limitations by encouraging the participation of all members through a series of prompts and the use of wait time. Additionally, one advantage of the focus group sessions was that students often fed off of one another, which helped to improve the number and quality of responses and encouraged students to engage in the discussion.

Another limitation is that the researcher focused only on three schools located in a school district in the Mid-Atlantic region. These schools do not reflect all schools that serve Latino males. While there are many similarities differences in funding; geographic region; mobility rate; socio-economic status; and graduation, ninth grade promotion, and dropout rate trend data; it may be inappropriate to generalize findings to schools in other states or regions.

A third limitation relates to research that relies upon student interview data. During the study, I assumed that each of the respondents provided thoughtful, honest, and accurate responses during the focus groups.

Additionally, because I interviewed a limited number of students in each of the three schools, the responses may not reflect the perceptions of all Latino male students. The current political climate made it somewhat difficult for the researcher to secure a large pool of eligible student participants in two of the study schools. Specifically, in School C, school staff posited that the low number of responses to my recruitment efforts was the result of student and parent skepticism about the purpose and process of the study. Many of the respondents also shared that the current political climate where

immigrants are concerned has made them reticent to share personal information or sign documents like the consent form.

An additional limitation involved the fact that the researcher conducted the coding process to identify emerging themes and subthemes. This process was a study limitation because of the lack of review and validation of the corresponding results with the research assistant or a third party.

Moreover, the fact that the researcher is an African-American female serves as a limitation to this inquiry. Noguera and Hurtado (2012) suggested that Machismo is a critical part of the Latino male culture. Students, specifically the red group, may have been more open with a researcher who was a male and/or of the same race/ethnicity.

Finally, there may be alternative explanations for the findings. The lack of comparable language acquisition, comprehension and confidence level may be a potential limitation affecting red group students. This limitation possibly contributes to the dearth of responses on focus group questions and fewer references compared to their green peers. Additionally, while the green group provided more responses it does not necessarily equate that the themes were more explored by the referenced students.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the nation's districts and schools experience an increase in the enrollment of Latino male students, it becomes increasingly important to understand the factors that support their school completion. Identifying the internal and external factors that can support student engagement can help reduce gaps in rates of ninth grade promotion and graduation between this subgroup of students and the aggregate. Through this study, the

researcher examined the perceptions of green (low-risk) and red (high-risk) ninth grade Latino male students on push, pull, and supportive factors that influence their school success.

The study revealed marked variances, along the lines of students' EWIR status, in the participants' number of responses that related to specific themes. As such, it may be valuable to research this topic more extensively to determine the differentiated transition activities, targeted interventions, advisement and wraparound supports districts and schools offer based on a student's EWIR band. Based on the discussion and analysis of the significant findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future inquiry into this area of inquiry.

First, the study could be replicated in other large urban and suburban districts with growing Latino populations and other underperforming subgroups; such as African-American males, African American females, Latina females, and special education students; to investigate their perceptions on push, pull, and supportive factors.

Additionally, examining the impact of professional development opportunities for teachers on pedagogical approaches, culturally responsive teaching, block scheduling to address the structure of 90 minute classes through the implementation of dynamic, multi-faceted lessons, engagement strategies that address the teacher-student relationship and classroom practices that support students' ninth grade and overall high school experience can add to the body of research on supporting Latino male students.

Future studies may also involve investigating the perceptions of twelfth grade Latino males in their last year of school. These older students may have a different

perspective on the internal and external factors that helped or challenged them after three years of high school. This exploration would add to the existing literature on underrepresented students' high school experience.

The findings from the present study would also be broadened through an examination the perceptions of school faculty and staff. Interviewing or conducting focus group sessions with teachers and/or administrators to examine their perceptions on the internal and external factors that impact Latino males' ninth grade success and school completion would provide a greater depth to the findings from the current inquiry and would provide valuable comparison data between the perceptions of students and those of teachers and administrators.

Another iteration of the study could focus on the use of early warning indicators by school staff (e.g., administrators, teachers, special educators, ESOL staff, counselors and coaches) as students transition to ninth grade and continue throughout their ninth grade year. Identifying and studying strategies and interventions that support students that enter at-risk or at low risk based on a set of predictive variables can support their ninth grade engagement and success thus increasing the number of students matriculating to tenth grade on time.

Implications for the District

This study revealed important implications for leaders and educators in District X. The results of this investigation highlight a need for practitioners to examine both the internal and external factors that lead to Latino male students' school engagement. While there were variances between the responses of red, green, and mixed group students that

related to certain pull factors (e.g., parents and negative personal outlook), a staggering number of students responded negatively to the following push factors: teachers are bad and the school schedule is not ideal. Both of these push factors are within the schools', and the districts, locus of control. Some of the recommendations that arose from this finding are as follows:

Recommendation 1. District teachers, administrators and leaders could benefit from the development of a Diversity Taskforce to address the needs of the changing student population. This cross-functional team of internal (e.g., department leads, administrators, teachers, students) and external partners (e.g., faith based organizations, elected officials, mentoring organizations, Latino advocacy groups, governmental agency representatives) should create policies and programs that promote the inclusion of all students and the support for diversity across all departments in of the district. The following could serve as key goals of the Taskforce:

a. Establish clear strategic priorities across all functional disciplines to increase the focus on meeting the academic and social needs of an increasingly diverse student population;
b. Establish programs at the school level that help students and their families cope with outside stressors that affect parental support and the quality of student work and behavior;
c. Develop and invest in initiatives that improve school engagement and academic achievement; such as extended learning time, mentoring programs,

and support services that are responsive to the needs of students and their families;

d. Review state and national models of transformational programs geared to the unique needs of Latino male students; programs may include nontraditional scheduling options, more hands-on and online learning opportunities, and a career strand;
e. Create pipelines for ongoing two-way communication for students, parents, and community members;
f. Develop a multifaceted multicultural education and/or a district diversity administrative policy that addresses the following departments:
    - Curriculum and instruction – to address pedagogical strategies and ensures there is differentiated support in content curriculum documents,
    - Human resources – to address the recruitment of a diverse workforce across various work groups, and
    - Student Services – to address the social-emotional challenges, attendance issues, disparities in discipline practices, and the home and community needs of students and families.
g. Develop and fund a year-long, district-wide advisory and transition program to facilitate students' transition and articulation from middle to high school, college and career readiness, college access, goal setting, and career planning; with an emphasis on differentiated, research-based strategies that address the

EWIR red and green band students support the unique needs of all students including Latino males.

h. Develop a Community Support Services for Families and Students information guide to provide a list of culturally-appropriate resources for families that includes state and county government agencies and community-based organizations that provide supports to children, youth, and families.
i. Develop in each region of the district a regularly scheduled evening of homework support.
j. Prior to each marking period/quarter, have a night to show parents how to have an effective parent conference with their children's teachers.
k. Have a designated phone line and website available to respond to Latino parents' concerns, and have several nights set aside inviting the parents of Latino children to the school to discuss programs with interpreters available.
l. Develop a "Parent University," also with interpreters, on nights and weekends to provide support to parents on content specific curriculum.
m. Develop a resource toolkit that includes quarterly activities to support students' development of organizational, conflict resolution, and self-advocacy skills, as well as activities for monitoring and progress checking by students and parents throughout students' ninth grade year.
n. Develop a comprehensive professional development plan and provide cultural proficiency and gender and racial bias training for staff to encourage the delivery of culturally-responsive instructional practices that engage Latino

male students and support non-discriminatory practices and ensure that schools are encouraging and supporting, not undermining, the academic success of all students. Sessions should include the following topics:

- Challenging teachers and administrators to examine the interface between the historical, political, and social constructions of communities and neighborhoods and the teaching and learning process;
- Increasing academic knowledge and understanding of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and language and how they impact educators relationships with students and parents;
- Enhance family and community engagement programs for Latino families to provide training on navigating school system policies, supporting language acquisition and strategies to support their children academically and socially. For example:

o. Create a Parent Handbook, in English and Spanish that will help all parents, including those of Latino students, understand important information about the how the U.S. school system works and be better prepared to help their children succeed in school. Topics should include but are not limited to the following:

- enrollment,
- school calendar and school day,
- transportation,
- instructional and specialty programs, and

- parent's role in the education of their children.

Recommendation 2. The District should develop processes for administrator goal setting and evaluation aligned with the elements of Professional Standard 5-Community of Caring. The core of the standard is the advocating, nurturing and sustaining schools to support the instructional program and school culture.

The standard provides elements for schools and school leaders to support the increasingly diverse student population and an inclusive environment for all students through the establishment of structures and systems that assist in the maintenance of a safe and caring school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student. Schools and districts should develop strategies to include:

- Establishment of a Diversity Workforce Taskforce to recruit, retain, mentor and train a diverse group of teachers, school personnel, administrators and central office staff to reflect the student population and support their academic achievement;
- Revision of Administrative Procedures regarding Multicultural Education discipline policies and teaching practices;
- Establishment of a proactive discipline plans;
- Development of peer mediation programs;
- Providing cultural awareness and sensitivity training for students and staff; and
- Establishment partnerships with community agencies to support the socio-emotional and wraparound service needs of students and families.

Recommendation 3. To support the recommendations included in District X's Transition Team report, district and school leaders should increase efforts directed toward Latino student college and career readiness by enrolling more students into Advanced Placement, Honors, Dual Enrollment and the number of Latino male students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Conclusion

It is evident that all themes mentioned by the students play an essential role in their perceptions of home and school factors that affect their level of engagement and school completion. In many schools and districts, data indicate that Latino students, specifically Latino males, are underperforming on key data points (ninth grade promotion, graduation, and dropout rates). The findings from this study revealed student perceptions that teachers and internal factors are one of the most critical push out factor that students encounter in schools. Addressing these factors that are within the control of schools and districts can affect the school success of this subgroup of students across the green (low-risk) and red (high-risk) EWIR bands.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

University of Maryland-College Park IRBNET Approval Letter

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE:	August 4, 2017
TO:	Janice Briscoe, Ed.D
FROM:	University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1068566-1] An investigation of the perceptions of Latino males on factors that impact their ninth grade success.
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	August 4, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE:	August 3, 2018
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to submission to the IRB Office, this project received scientific review from the departmental IRB Liaison.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of August 3, 2018.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Appendix A (cont.)

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

Appendix B

District X IRB Approval

October 17, 2017

Ms. Janice Briscoe
Department of Human Development
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20741

Dear Ms. Briscoe:

The review of your request to conduct the research entitled "An Investigation *of Students Perceptions on* Factors *That* Impact Latino Male Students' Ninth Grade Success" has been completed. Based on the examination, I am pleased to inform you that the Department of Testing, Research & Evaluation has granted conditional authorization for you to proceed with your study.

Authorization for this research extends through the 2017-2018 school year only. If you are not able to complete your data collection during this period, you must submit a written request for an extension. We reserve the right to withdraw approval at any time or decline to extend the approval if the implementation of your study adversely impacts any of the school district's activities.

If the conditions summarized above are acceptable to you, please secure written approval of the principals of Study Schools A, B and C High Schools on the attached Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study forms. The original signed copy of these fonns should be forwarded to my attention and a copy given to the respective principal. Regarding the Parent Consent and Student Assent forms, please be aware that only approved copies (stamped 'APPROVED') can be distributed to your target research subjects. Also the content of the 'Email and Letter to Principals' and other correspondences you propose to send electronically must be exactlas those of the paper versions submitted with your application. Should you revise any of these documents or change the procedure, the revisions and the revised procedure must be approved by this office before being used in this study.

The district will only release archival data of students for whom you have signed Parent/Guardian Consent and Student Assent forms. All requests for student data must be forwarded to my attention. In order to receive student data, you must submit a list of students for whom you have both signed consent and assent forms, along with copies of the original signed forms. Typically, the turnaround time for data requests is about one month. Although we strive to keep this timeline, department's obligations are a priority.

An abstract and one copy of the final report should be forwarded to the Department of Testing, Research & Evaluation within one month of successful defense of your dissertation. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached by phone or by email.

I wish you success in your study.

Appendix C

Student Assent Form-English

Project Title	**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON FACTORS THAT IMPACT LATINO MALE STUDENTS' NINTH GRADE SUCCESS**
Purpose of the Study	You are being invited to participate in a research study that is examining the perceptions of ninth grade students on factors that help, support or get in the way of their school engagement and success. This research is being conducted by Janice Briscoe (the Researcher) under the direction of Dr. Ellen Fabian at the University of Maryland as part of her dissertation. You are being invited because you are a ninth grade Latino male student in District X Schools. The focus group will be a discussion about school, studying, teachers, family, and your experience in ninth grade.
Procedures	The researcher will select a sample of students to interview from the list of students whose parents consented to their participation and the students themselves agree to participate in this research. The students that will be interviewed will be selected based on the academic achievement, school attendance and suspension during the 2016-17 school year. If you assent, the researcher will visit your school during the first quarter of the 2017-18 school year to conduct a 45-minute discussion group with you and 5 other students who have consented to participate in this research. Also, you child will complete a 5 minute demographic questionnaire about yourself. You and the other students will meet the researcher in another classroom. She will ask the group to discuss 12 different questions during their lunch period to avoid missing a class period and assignments. The discussion will not include names, and answers will not be shared with teachers. Your participation or choice to not participate will not have any impact on their school grades. The discussion will be audio-recorded, and the recording will later be transcribed as text. The written translation will be stored on a flash drive with a passcode.

Example of Focus Group Questions	Question 5) What things about home get in the way of your success at school? Question 6) What things about school help you do well in ninth grade?
Potential Risks and Discomforts	Answering questions about your school experience and life can be hard. The interviewer has worked with high school students and the Latino population. You will be excused from the discussion if you do not want to continue. Your Professional School Counselor will be nearby if there is any problem.
Potential Benefits & Incentives	While you may not directly benefit from participating in our focus group, the researcher hopes that this study will help high schools to identify the supports should be provided to our Latino male high school students to increase the number of students that pass ninth grade and graduate from high school.

Confidentiality	Your answers will be confidential. No one will know how you answered any of the questions. To keep this information safe, the copy of your responses will be stored securely on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. The researcher will have sole access to the data and reports including information shared with the University of Maryland community or the general public will contain a summary of responses without the identification of any one participant ensuring anonymity of response data. These data will be destroyed after three years. Any paper forms will be shredded and all digital data will be erased permanently from all devices. All of the data and forms will be stored within the researcher's home office in a storage container. Participants will be given a copy of their signed forms, so they can keep them for their own records. *"If the researcher writes a report or article about this research project, Your identify will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. Possible exceptions to confidentiality include cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. If there is reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, we are required by law to report this suspicion to the proper authorities."*
Compensation	You will receive lunch while participating in the focus group. Additionally, students' names will be entered into a drawing for two $25 Amazon gift cards that will be given at the end of each focus group session.

Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not have any positive or negative affect on your relationship, standing, or grades with the school or Public Schools. **If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the researcher, Janice Briscoe at 301-442-3217 or janbris@umd.edu.** You may also reach the researcher's professor: **Dr. Ellen Fabian** **(301)405-2872** **University of Maryland, Benjamin Building, 3rd Floor** **efabian@umd.edu**
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount Hall** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB and District X procedures for research involving human subjects.

<table>
<tr><td>Statement of Consent</td><td colspan="2">Your signature indicates that you are under 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

I grant permission to District X Schools to release my data itemized below to the researcher at the University of Maryland College Park for use in the study “An Investigation of the Perceptions of Latino Males on Factors that Impact their Ninth Grade Success”. I affirm that the data will be used sorely for this research study:

• End-of-year academic grades in (Reading and Mathematics) for School year 2016-17
• Attendance Rate for School year 2016-17
• Suspension Rate for School year 2016-17

If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Signature and Date</td><td>NAME OF PARTICIPANT

(Please Print)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Student ID #</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>DATE</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Appendix D

Formulario de consentimiento para los estudiantes (menores de 18 años) que participaron en el Grupo de Enfoque-Inglés

Título del Proyecto	**UNA INVESTIGACIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES percepciones sobre factores que afectan MACHOS de los estudiantes latinos noveno grado ÉXITO**
Propósito del estudio	va a ser invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación que se examinar las percepciones de los estudiantes del noveno grado de factores que ayudan, apoyan o se interponga en el camino de su participación en la escuela y el éxito. Esta investigación está siendo realizada por Janice Briscoe (Investigador), bajo la dirección del Dr. Ellen Fabian de la Universidad de Maryland como parte de su tesis. Se le invita porque usted es un estudiante masculino latino noveno grado en las Escuelas Públicas del Condado de Prince George. El grupo de enfoque será una discusión acerca de la escuela, estudiar, maestros, familiares, y su experiencia en el noveno grado.
Procedimientos	El investigador seleccionará una muestra de estudiantes de entrevistar a partir de la lista de los estudiantes cuyos padres dado su consentimiento para su participación y los propios estudiantes de acuerdo en participar en esta investigación. Los estudiantes que serán entrevistados serán seleccionados en base al logro académico, la asistencia escolar y la suspensión durante el año escolar 2016-17. Si asentimiento, el investigador va a visitar su escuela durante el primer trimestre del año escolar 2017-18 para llevar a cabo un grupo de discusión de 45 minutos con usted y otros 5 estudiantes que han accedido a participar en esta investigación. Además, él o ella completará un cuestionario demográfico 5 minutos sobre sí mismo. Usted y los otros estudiantes se encontrará con el investigador en otro salón. Se pedirá al grupo para discutir 12 diferentes preguntas durante su periodo de almuerzo para evitar la falta de un período de clase y las tareas. La discusión no incluirá nombres, y las respuestas no será compartida con los maestros. Su participación o la opción de no participar no tendrán ningún impacto en sus calificaciones

	escolares. . La discusión será grabada en audio y la grabación más tarde será transcrita en forma de texto. La traducción escrita se almacena en una unidad flash con un código de acceso.
Ejemplo de grupos de enfoque Preguntas	Pregunta 5) ¿Qué cosas acerca hogar obtiene en el camino de su éxito en la escuela? Pregunta 6) ¿Qué cosas acerca de la ayuda escolar que haces bien en el noveno grado?
Los riesgos potenciales y molestias	responder a preguntas sobre su experiencia en la escuela y la vida puede ser difícil. El entrevistador ha trabajado con los estudiantes de la escuela secundaria y la población latina. Va a ser exento de la discusión si no desea continuar. Su escuela Consejero profesional estará cerca si hay algún problema.
Los posibles beneficios e incentivos	Si bien no se pueden beneficiar directamente de participar en nuestro grupo de enfoque, el investigador espera que este estudio ayudará a las escuelas secundarias para identificar los soportes aquí serán proporcionar a nuestros estudiantes de secundaria macho latino para aumentar el número de estudiantes que pasan a noveno grado y graduarse de la escuela secundaria.

Confidencialidad	Sus respuestas serán confidenciales. Nadie sabrá cómo respondió a ninguna de las preguntas. Para mantener esta información segura, la copia de sus respuestas se almacenan de forma segura en un equipo que está protegido por contraseña. Para proteger la confidencialidad, su nombre real no se utilizará en la copia por escrito de la discusión. El investigador tendrá acceso exclusivo a los datos e informes que incluyen información compartida con la comunidad Univerisity de Maryland o el público en general contendrá un resumen de las respuestas sin la identificación de cualquier participante garantizar el anonimato de los datos de respuesta. Estos datos serán destruidos después de tres años. Cualquier forma de papel serán triturados y todos los datos digitales se RASED permanentemente de todos los dispositivos. Todos los datos y los formularios serán almacenados dentro de la oficina en casa del investigador en un contenedor de almacenamiento. Los participantes recibirán una copia de sus formularios firmados, para que puedan mantener para sus propios registros. *"Si el investigador redacta un informe o un artículo sobre este proyecto de investigación, su identificación serán protegidos en la mayor medida posible. Su información puede ser compartida con los representantes de la Universidad de Maryland, College Park o las autoridades gubernamentales si usted o alguien más está en peligro o si estamos obligados a hacerlo por ley. Las posibles excepciones a la confidencialidad incluyen los casos de sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil. Si hay razones para creer que un niño ha sido abusado o descuidado, estamos obligados por ley a reportar esta sospecha a las autoridades*
competentes." **Compensación**	Recibirá el almuerzo durante su participación en el grupo de enfoque. Además, los nombres de los estudiantes entrarán en el sorteo de dos $ 25 tarjetas de regalo de Amazon que serán entregados al final de cada sesión de grupo.

Derecho de retirar y Preguntas	Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted puede optar por no participar en absoluto. Su decisión de participar o no participar en este estudio no tendrá ningún efecto positivo o negativo en su relación, de pie o grados con la escuela o escuelas públicas del Condado de Prince George. **Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas, o si necesita reportar una lesión relacionada con la investigación, póngase en contacto con el investigador, Janice Briscoe al 301-442-3217 o janbris@umd.edu.** También puede llegar a profesor del investigador: **Dr. Ellen Fabian** **(301)405-2872,** **Universidad de Maryland Benjamin Building, 3ª Planta** **efabian@umd.edu**
Derechos participant	Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante en la investigación o desea informar una la investigación relacionada con la lesión, por favor, póngase en contacto con: **Universidad de MarylandCollege Park** **Oficina de la Junta de Revisión Institucional** **1204 Marie Hall montados en** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Teléfono: 301-405-0678** Esta investigación ha sido revisado de acuerdo con la Universidad de Maryland, College Park IRB y procedimientos para la investigación en seres humanos.

<table>
<tr><td>Declaración de Consentimiento</td><td colspan="2">Su firma indica que usted es menor de 18 años de edad; usted ha leído este formulario de consentimiento o ha tenido que lea a usted; sus preguntas han sido contestadas a su satisfacción y usted acepta voluntariamente participar en este estudio de investigación. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento firmado.

Doy permiso a las Escuelas Públicas del para liberar mis datos a continuación se enumeran al investigador en la Universidad de Maryland, College Park para su uso en el estudio “Una investigación de las percepciones de los hombres latinos sobre los factores que afectan su grado de éxito Novena”. Afirmo que los datos serán utilizados urgentemente para este estudio de investigación:
● Fin de año grados académicos en lectura y matemáticas para el año escolar 2016-17
● Tasa de Asistencia para el año escolar 2016-17
● Tasa de suspensión para el año escolar 2016-17
Si está de acuerdo participar, por favor firme su nombre a continuación.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Firma y Fecha</td><td>Nombre del participante

(en letra de imprenta)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Student ID #</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>FIRMA DEL PARTICIPANTE</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>FECHA</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Appendix E

Parental Consent Form for the Focus Groups-English

Project Title	**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON FACTORS THAT IMPACT LATINO MALE STUDENTS' NINTH GRADE SUCCESS**
Purpose of the Study	Your child is being invited to participate in a research study that is examining the perceptions of ninth grade students on factors that help, support or get in the way of their school engagement and success. This research is being conducted by Janice Briscoe (the 'Researcher') under the direction of Dr. Ellen Fabian at the University of Maryland as part of her dissertation. Your child is being invited because he is a ninth grade Latino male student in Prince George's County Public Schools. The focus group will be a discussion about school, studying, teachers, family, and his experience in ninth grade.
Procedures	The researcher will select a sample of students to interview from the list of students whose parents consented to their participation and the students themselves agree to participate in this research. The students that will be interviewed will be selected based on the academic achievement, school attendance and suspension during the 2016-17 school year. If you consent and your child assent, the researcher will visit your child's school during the first quarter of the 2017-18 school year to conduct a 45-minute discussion group with your child and 5 other students who have consented to participate in this research. Also, your child will complete a 5 minute demographic questionnaire about himself. Your child and the other students will meet the researcher in another classroom. She will ask the group to discuss 12 different questions during their lunch period to avoid missing a class period and assignments. The discussion will not include names, and answers will not be shared with teachers. Your child's participation or choice to not participate will not have any impact on their school grades. . The discussion will be audio-recorded, and the recording will later be transcribed as text. The written translation will be stored on a flash drive with a passcode.
Example of Focus Group Questions	Question 5) What things about home get in the way of your success at school? Question 6) What things about school help you do well in ninth grade?

Potential Risks and Discomforts	Answering questions about school experiences and school can be hard. The interviewer has worked with high school students and the Latino population. Your son will be excused from the session and the researcher will stop the interview if your student does not want to continue.
Potential Benefits and Incentives	While your child may not directly benefit from participating in our focus group, the researcher hopes that this study will help high schools to identify the supports that should be provided to Latino male high school students to meet graduation success.
Confidentiality	Your child's answers will be confidential. No one will know how they answered any of the questions. To keep this information safe, the copy of your child's responses will be stored securely on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your child's real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. The researcher will have sole access to the data and reports including information shared with the University of Maryland community or the general public will contain a summary of responses without the identification of any one participant ensuring total anonymity of response data. These data will be destroyed after three years. Any paper forms will be shredded and all digital data will be erased permanently from all devices. All of the data and forms will be stored in a folder within the researcher's home office in a storage container. Participants will be given a copy of their consent forms, so they can keep them for their own records. *"If the researcher writes a report or article about this research project, your child's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your child's information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. Possible exceptions to confidentiality include cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. If there is reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, we are required by law to report this suspicion to the proper authorities."*
Compensation	Your child will receive lunch while participating in the focus group. Additionally, students' names will be entered into a drawing for two $25 Amazon gift cards that will be given at the end of each focus group session.

Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not have any positive or negative affect on your relationship, standing, or grades with the school or Prince George's County Public Schools. **If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the researcher, Janice Briscoe at 301-669-6000 or janbris@umd.edu.** You may also reach the researcher's professor: **Dr. Ellen Fabian** **(301)405-2872** **University of Maryland, Benjamin Building, 3rd Floor** **@umd.edu**
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your student's rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount Hall** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

<table>
<tr><td>Statement of Consent</td><td colspan="2">I am at least 18 years old and have read and understand this consent form. I voluntarily agree to allow my child to participate in this research study.

I grant permission Public Schools to release my child's data itemized below to the researcher at the University of Maryland College Park for use in the study "An Investigation of the Perceptions of Latino Males on Factors that Impact their Ninth Grade Success". I affirm that the data will be used sorely for this research study:

• End-of-year academic grades in Reading and Mathematics for School year 2016-17
• Attendance Rate for School year 2016-17
• Suspension Rate for School year 2016-17

If you agree for your child to participate, please sign your name below and you will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Signature and Date</td><td>NAME of Child participant

[Please Print]</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Student</u> ID #</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>NAME of PARENT/GUARDIAN

[Please Print]</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>SIGNATURE of PARENT/GUARDIAN</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>DATE</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Appendix F

Formulario de consentimiento de los padres para los Grupos Focales-Inglés

Título del Proyecto	**UNA INVESTIGACIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES percepciones sobre factores que afectan LATINO MACHOS ALUMNADOnoveno grado éxito**
Objetodel estudio	Estamos invitando a su hijo a participar en un estudio de investigación que está examinando la percepciones de los estudiantes de noveno grado en factores que ayudan, apoyan o se interponga en el camino de su participación en la escuela y el éxito. Esta investigación está siendo realizada por Janice Briscoe bajo la dirección del Dr. Ellen Fabian de la Universidad de Maryland como parte de su tesis. Su hijo está siendo seleccionado porque es un estudiante masculino latino noveno grado en las Escuelas Públicas del Condado. El grupo de enfoque será una discusión acerca de la escuela, estudiar, maestros, familiares, y su experiencia en el noveno grado.
Procedimientos	El investigadorutilizarán el 2016-17 Indicador de Alerta Temprana de informe para seleccionar a los estudiantes de la muestra de entrevistar después de cartas se distribuyen a todos los candidatos elegibles. Durante el primer trimestre del año escolar 2017-18, el entrevistador vendrá a la escuela de su hijo para llevar a cabo un grupo de discusión de 45 minutos con su hijo y otros 5 estudiantes. Además, su hijo recibirá un cuestionario demográfico de 5 minutos durante la auto-realización. Su hijo y los otros estudiantes se reunirán el investigador en otro salón. Se pedirá al grupo para discutir 12 diferentes preguntas durante su periodo de almuerzo para evitar la falta de un período de clase y las tareas. La discusión no incluirá nombres, y las respuestas no será compartida con los maestros. La participación o la elección de su hijo para no participar no tendrán ningún impacto en sus calificaciones escolares. . La discusión será grabada en audio y la grabación más tarde será transcrita en forma de texto. La traducción escrita se almacena en una unidad flash con un código de acceso.

Ejemplo de grupos de enfoque Preguntas	Pregunta 5) ¿Qué cosas acerca hogar obtiene en el camino de su éxito en la escuela? Pregunta 6) ¿Qué cosas acerca de la ayuda escolar que haces bien en el noveno grado?
Los riesgos potenciales y **molestias**	responder a preguntas sobre las experiencias escolares y la escuela puede ser difícil. El entrevistador ha trabajado con los estudiantes de la escuela secundaria y la población latina en el distrito. Su hijo será excusado de la sesión y el investigador va a parar la entrevista si su hijo no quiere continuar. Consejero de la Escuela Profesional de su hijo se comunicará con usted si hay algún problema.
Beneficios potenciales e Incentivos	Mientras su hijo no podrán beneficiarse directamente de participar en nuestro grupo de enfoque, esperamos que este estudio nos ayudará a identificar los apoyos que proporcionamos a nuestros estudiantes de secundaria varones latinos para satisfacer el éxito de la graduación.

Confidencialidad	respuestas de su hijo serán confidenciales. Nadie sabrá cómo respondieron alguna de las preguntas. Para mantener esta información segura, la copia de las respuestas de su hijo se almacena de forma segura en un equipo que está protegido por contraseña. Para proteger la confidencialidad, el verdadero nombre de su hijo no va a utilizar en la copia por escrito de la discusión. El investigador tendrá acceso exclusivo a los datos e informes que incluyen información compartida con el distrito contendrá un resumen de las respuestas sin la identificación de cualquier participante se preserva el anonimato total de datos de respuesta. Estos datos serán destruidos después de tres años. Cualquier forma de papel serán triturados y todos los datos digitales se borrarán permanentemente de todos los dispositivos. Todos los datos y los formularios se almacenarán en una carpeta dentro de una oficina de distrito en un recipiente de almacenamiento. Los participantes recibirán una copia de sus formularios de consentimiento, para que puedan mantener para sus propios registros. *"Si escribimos un informe o artículo sobre este proyecto de investigación, la identidad de su hijo será protegida en la mayor medida posible. Datos de su hijo puede ser compartida con representantes de la Universidad de Maryland, College Park o las autoridades gubernamentales si su hijo o alguien más está en peligro o si estamos obligados a hacerlo por ley. Las posibles excepciones a la confidencialidad incluyen los casos de sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil. Si hay razones para creer que un niño ha sido abusado o descuidado, estamos obligados por ley a reportar esta sospecha a las autoridades*
competentes." **Compensación**	Su hijo recibirá el almuerzo durante su participación en el grupo de enfoque. Además, los nombres de los estudiantes entrarán en el sorteo de dos $ 25 tarjetas de regalo de Amazon que serán entregados al final de cada sesión de grupo.

Derecho de retirar ypreguntas	participaciónde su hijo en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted puede optar por no participar en absoluto. Su decisión de participar o no participar en este estudio no tendrá ningún efecto positivo o negativo en su relación, de pie o grados con la escuela o escuelas públicas. La información de contacto del asesor escolar profesional en la escuela de su hijo es: La información de contacto del Asistente de Asistencia de la comunidad en la escuela de su hijo es; (nombre será individualizado para cada escuela, junto con el número de teléfono y la información de contactos de correo electrónico) en caso de necesitar los servicios de traducción de las preguntas en relación con este estudio **Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas, o si necesita reportar una lesión relacionada con la investigación, póngase en contacto con el investigador, Janice Briscoe al 301-669-6000 o janbris@umd.edu.** También puede llegar a profesor del investigador: **Dr. Ellen Fabian** **(301)405-2872,** **Universidad de Maryland Benjamin Building,3ª planta** **@ umd.edu**

Derechos participant	Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de los derechos de su hijo como un participante en la investigación o desea informar una lesión relacionada con la investigación, por favor, póngase en contacto con: **Universidad de Maryland en College Park** **Institutional Review Board Oficina** **1204Marie Hall** **College Parkmontados,Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Teléfono: 301-405-0678** Esta investigación ha sido revisado de acuerdo con la Universidad de Maryland, College Park procedimientos del IRB para la investigación en seres humanos.
Declaración de Consentimiento	Tengo por lo menos 18 años de edad y haber leído y entendido este formulario de consentimiento. Yo voluntariamente de acuerdo en permitir que mi hijo participe en este estudio de investigación. Doy permiso a las Escuelas Públicas. a conocer los datos de mi hijo a continuación se enumeran al investigador en la Universidad de Maryland, College Park para su uso en el estudio "Una investigación de las percepciones de los hombres latinos sobre los factores que afectan su grado de éxito Novena". Afirmo que los datos serán utilizados urgentemente para este estudio de investigación: ● Académico (lectura y matemáticas) años -Escuela2016-17 ● añosAsistencia de la Escuela 2016-17 ● Escuela Suspensiones-año 2016-17 Si está de acuerdo para que su hijo participe, por favor firmar su nombre a continuación y recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento firmado.

Firma y Fecha	**Nombre del participante niño** **[letra de imprenta]** **Estudiante ID #**	
	Nombre del padre / tutor **[letra de imprenta]**	
	Firma del padre / tutor	
	Fecha	

Appendix G

Letter to Community Outreach Assistants of Study Schools

Good Afternoon Community Outreach Assistants:

Your principal has agreed to allow me to conduct two focus group sessions with selected Latino male ninth grade students at your school as part of my University of Maryland-College Park doctoral research. I am seeking the assistance of the Community Outreach Assistant to provide translation services should parents have questions or clarification regarding the letters or the study.

I will visit classrooms during the first quarter of the 2017-2018 school year. As the researcher, I am seeking permission to visit your school during the referenced time period. Within each focus group session there will be six Latino male ninth grade students from your high school I will spend forty-five minutes with each group to conduct a focus group session that consists of open-ended questions. I will spend an additional 5 minutes with students conducting a brief demographic survey.

The overall purpose of this study is to gather information that will add to existing knowledge about engagement, academic performance and graduation rates for Latino male students. The study will seek to answer critical questions about the supports and resources at school and home that support or hinder their school success and to improve the overall academic outcomes of this growing population within the school district. As a reward for participation, students will be entered in a drawing for two $25 Amazon gift cards at each school. Also, the participating students will receive lunch. There will be no follow-up sessions. This is a one-time data collection event. There are no more than minimal risks for involvement in this study. The researcher and the trained recorder will be the only persons in the data collection session other than the actual student participants.

Thank you so much for your consideration in supporting me through the distribution and collection of letters along with translation services should the need arise. I look forward to hearing from you. Your decision to participate or not participate in the current study will not negatively or positively affect your relationship with Prince George's County Public Schools.

Greatly appreciated,
Janice Briscoe
janbris@umd.edu
(301)442-3217

Appendix H

Email and Letter to Principals of Study Schools

Greetings Principal, School A
Principal, School B
Principal, School C

(Email will be individually addressed and sent to each principal)
I would like to request your approval to conduct dissertation research with your ninth grade Latino male students. Please see the official letter below. Additionally, I will forward the *Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study* document (**will be provided to researcher once IRB application is approved by Public Schools and attached to IRB documents**) and ask that you indicate your willingness to have the study conducted at your school on the lower portion of the form. Once signed, please send it to both Office of Research and Evaluation and me via scan or fax.

Thanks!!
Janice

Good Afternoon Principal A, B or C:

(Letter will be individually addressed and sent to each principal)

I am requesting your support to conduct two focus group sessions with a sample of your Latino male ninth grade students as part of my University of Maryland-College Park doctoral research. I would like to contact your Professional School Counselor, Registrar and Community Outreach Assistant and request their assistance in helping me identify the ninth grade Latino male students in your school. Once identified, I will also need their assistance in contacting students after I identify a pool of participants using your school's first quarter Early Warning Indicator Report. I am also requesting assistance in collecting consent and assent forms from the students and parents who agree to participate.

As the researcher, I am seeking permission to visit your school during the fall quarter of the 2017-2018 school year. Within each focus group session there will be six Latino male ninth grade students from your high school I will spend forty-five minutes with each group to conduct a focus group session that consists of open-ended questions. I will spend an additional 5 minutes with students conducting a brief demographic survey.

The overall purpose of this study is to gather information that will add to existing knowledge about engagement, academic performance and graduation rates for Latino male students. The study will seek to answer critical questions about the supports and resources at school and home that support or hinder their school success and to improve the overall academic outcomes of this growing population within the school district. As a

reward for participation, student will be entered in a drawing for two $25 Amazon gift cards at each school. Also, the participating students will receive lunch. There will be no follow-up sessions. This is one time data collection event. There are no more than minimal risks for involvement in this study. The researcher and the trained recorder will be the only persons in the data collect session other than the actual student participants.

Both the University of Maryland and Prince George's County Public Schools Institutional Review Board (IRB) have approved this study. Attached to this email is a description of the study, as well as the IRB approval from both University of Maryland-College Park and Public Schools.

Thank you so much for your consideration in allowing me to interview your students. I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know within the next week if I can contact your Professional School Counselor, Registrar and Community Outreach Assistant. Your decision to participate or not participate in the current study will not negatively or positively affect your relationship with Public Schools.

Greatly appreciated,
Janice Briscoe
janbris@umd.edu
(301)442-3217

Appendix I

Demographic Survey

1. What is your country of origin? _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. I am a:

- 1st generation (born in Puerto Rico or non-U.S. county)
- 2nd generation (born in the U.S., mother born in Puerto Rico or non-US. County
- 3rd generation (both student and mother were born in U.S.)

4. How many years have you lived in the United States? _____

5. How many years have you been in school in PGCPS_____

6. Is English your native language (the first language you learned to speak when you were a child?

7. Years in 9th grade
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - Other

8. I have a job_____
   - Yes
   - No

If "yes", I work _____

_____Less than 1 hour
_____1-2 hours
_____3-4 hours
_____4-5 hours
_____6-10 hours
_____11-15 hours
_____16-20 hours
_____21-30 hours
_____31-40 hours

9. I participate in an afterschool or extracurricular activity at my school _____
   - Yes

- No

If yes, please list the name of your sport, club or other activity:

Sport _____
Club_____
Other Activity_____

Appendix J

Focus Group Questions

We will start with a few questions about your general feeling of your school and ninth grade experience?

1. Do you like school? Yes or No

   If "yes" ask: What do you like about school?
   If "no" ask: What do you not like about school?

2. What are your overall impressions of your school?

3. What things about your home help you do well in school?

4. What things about home get in the way of your success at school?

5. What things about school help you do well in ninth grade?

6. What things about school get in the way of your success in school?

7. What things about school help Latino male students do better?

8. What could the school do to keep students or Latino males in school?

9. Are there any adults at your school that you have a close relationship with?
   If "yes", ask: How do they help you?

10. Name some things that might be done to help kids pass 9th grade?

11. Name some things that might be done to prevent students from dropping out of school?

12. Name some things that teachers might do to help you in school?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your ninth grade experience before we finish our focus group session?

Appendix K

Script and Statement to Student Participants at Start of Focus Group Sessions

Researcher will introduce herself to the students and state the purpose of the focus group sessions as follows:

You and your parent/guardian have consented to participating in the research I am conducting through the University of Maryland College Park. The purpose of the research is to hear from the perspective of each of you, the supports, challenges and ways high schools and public school districts can improve the ninth grade experience of Latino male students.

This focus group session is an important part of the research. The session will take approximately 45 minutes. Additionally, you will complete a brief demographic questionnaire so I can learn more about your background. This group is being held to find out about your experiences and perceptions of the factors that help or hinder your success in school. Your responses are important to me. I am interested in learning how the district can help more students be successful in school and graduate from high school. The data from this focus group will be used by high school and public school districts to identify strategies and programs that support increased school engagement and graduation rates. I will be asking you a series of questions. All of the ideas that you share today are confidential. That means that nobody's name will be written in our notes. I am taping our conversation so I don't have to take notes right now. This way I can pay attention to the conversation. We will use the recording to write notes for the research and later we will erase the recording. Please use this opportunity to share your thoughts.

Here's what I ask from everyone who is here:

1) Please feel safe to express your ideas and tell the truth.
2) There is no wrong answer.
3) Please do not talk about this conversation with anyone else after you leave here today.

As a reminder, your participation is voluntary. At any time during this focus group session, you may make a request that I stop the session or turn off the audio recording.

To keep this information safe, the copy of your responses will be stored securely on a computer that is password-protected. These data will be destroyed after three years. Any paper forms will be shredded and all digital data will be erased permanently from all devices.

If I ask you a question, you can answer it or choose not to answer it. I want to say thank you again and I look forward to our discussion.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix L

Email Permission for Survey Use

Alison Hanks-Sloan 9:07 AM (29 minutes ago)

to Kolawole, me

Greetings, Dr. Sunmonu,

I hope the school year is going great!

The future Dr. Janice Briscoe has my permission to use any of the survey questions from my dissertation.

- Name: Alison Hanks-Sloan, Ed.D.
- Title: Identifying the Supports and Challenges of High School Latino English Language Learners, 2016
- Questions: any focus group or survey questions
- Grant doctoral candidate: Janice Briscoe, UMCP doctoral candidate to use in her study titled: An Investigation of the Perceptions of Latino Males on Factors that Impact their Ninth Grade Success

Please let me know if you need any additional support.

THANKS!

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