



2016

CHAMPION OF CHILDREN REPORT

Voices of Latino Boys
Executive Summary



KIRWAN INSTITUTE
for the Study of Race and Ethnicity



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are in the midst of a demographic transitioning that will change our country, and our central Ohio community, for years to come. The demographic shifts will challenge not only our systems to respond to the needs of a more diversified population, but will challenge how we relate to each other across our differences. For many, these changes are a moment of opportunity, a chance to put our values of equality and opportunity into action. Indeed, by 2035, it is projected that one in three children will be Latino.¹ How we respond to these changes today will determine how well our Latino children—both locally, and across the country—fare tomorrow.

Over the past few years, the Champion of Children reports have been steadily making the case that here in central Ohio, we also need to be considering these changes. We've sought to galvanize advocates, officials, parents, and anyone who cares about the health and well-being of our home tomorrow to care about the health and well-being of our children, today. Accordingly, we must pay attention to the disparities that manifest in our communities.

There is work to be done. For example, an opportunity analysis of Franklin County reveals that 51% of Latino and 63% of Black children live in distressed neighborhoods (i.e. low opportunity neighborhoods). In contrast, only 14% of Asian children and 26% of White children live in the county's low opportunity neighborhoods. In the 2012–2013 cohort, Ohio had a Latino/White high school graduation gap of 22%, one of the highest in the nation. Ohio also records alarming disparities in out-of-school suspension rates: 8.3% for Latino males compared to 4.4% for White males.² Finally, in Ohio, only 22% of Latino males were at or above 8th grade reading proficiency, compared to 38% of White males.³ For math, 28% of Latino males were at or above proficiency compared to 46% of White males.⁴

However, we know that limitations of the data do not allow us to capture the full experience of local Latino children and their families. In particular, the data do not capture the hope, resilience, and determination that were so apparent in the comments and experiences parents and boys shared with us as we prepared for this report. In 2015, we looked at boys of color broadly; this year, we focus on Latino boys, because we know that this is a story that must be told if we are to design effective strategies for lifting all of our children to success.

A better understanding of our Latino community

Latino parents are no different than other parents: they want more for their children than they themselves had. Indeed, parents were laser-focused on ensuring as many opportunities for their children as possible, including taking multiple jobs, some of which are dangerous, usually with low pay or lower skilled than for what they are actually qualified. For parents, higher education and professional careers for their children were paramount goals. In many families, the boys we spoke with would be the first generation to go on to college. The strength of social ties, including faith, family, and friends, was also evident in the comments shared, and research supports that these ties provide an important buffer for youth against negative biases they may encounter. Indeed, the boys described a great pride in their culture, sharing how Latinos “support each other, stick together, even in the face of prejudice and discrimination.”

Yet there are some unique challenges that Latino families face and which are explored further in our report. These include:

- *Limited time and resources available to help parents prepare for the future.* Many parents noted that their jobs did not allow for quality family time, or that they had to work more than one minimum wage job to provide for their family. Parents desired a safe place for their children to go when they needed academic help, or to engage in extracurricular activities, while they were at work.
- *Language barriers at home and in the community.* Boys and parents shared that their limited English proficiency presented challenges. For example, parents noted long wait times at appointments for a translator to become available. They also noted, however, that many organizations did not offer information in accessible languages, assuming Spanish was a universal language of Latinos, which it is not. Boys spoke of the challenge of having to speak two languages, one at home, one in school. Parents shared frustration over not being able to help their children with homework because of their limited English proficiency. Boys sometimes found themselves on the receiving end of negative treatment from classmates or teachers if they struggled with English.
- *Documentation status and the stress that goes along with it.* The fear of deportation can be subtle but powerful, regardless of actual legal status. In 2009, almost 60% of Latino children in the United States lived in families in which at least one parent is an immigrant.⁵ However, estimating the actual number of immigrants in the US without documentation is challenging for several reasons, including large sampling margins of errors but also the challenges of actually connecting with this population, which may be less likely to respond to surveys or speak English, more likely to have temporary living arrangements, and may fear surveyors will report them to the government. Boys were acutely aware of how precarious such a situation could be, and described great anxiety over deportation and immigration issues for their parents.



Despite these challenges, hope was ever-present throughout our conversations. In fact, in sharing about their experiences and culture, the boys repeatedly described an attitude and openness that we as a larger community must emulate and that is in keeping with American traditions. We must take our cues from this untapped resource to show us how to be in relationship with one another in a way that builds each of us up. This sense of acceptance and inclusion and curiosity should not just activate our relationships with each other, but should also inspire a transformation in our systems and how we provide services, and how we organize and revitalize our neighborhoods. It is our hope that this year's Champion of Children report has begun to widen our community's understanding, expanding our minds and our hearts to action and advocacy. In order to move toward inclusion we recommend:

1. Build a diverse teacher pipeline to match the children demographic pipeline
2. Promote emotional and cultural intelligence in the classroom
3. Provide dedicated ambassadors or mentors to children and their families
4. Create a dedicated space where affordable resources are available to children and parents

As a community, we can navigate the demographic change that is upon us successfully, and come through it more inclusive and enriched. The implementation of these recommendations provide the first steps we can take for ensuring environments that support healthy living and learning for Latino children in central Ohio. As the boys described in our groups, it begins with an openness and a curiosity to learn more about each other, to relate to each other in new ways, to uncover and build from the unique experiences and perspectives our Latino neighbors hold.

CITATIONS

- 1 National Council of La Raza. "Toward a more vibrant and youthful nation: Latino children in the 2010 Census," 2011.
- 2 Schott Foundation for Public Education. "Black Lives Matter: the Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males," 2015
- 3 *Id.*
- 4 *Id.*
- 5 Supra n. 1

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