

6. Education: The Gap Between Expectations and Achievement

Latino schooling in the U.S. has long been characterized by high dropout rates and low college completion rates.¹⁵ Both problems have moderated over time, and across generations, though a persistent educational attainment gap remains between Hispanics and non-Hispanics.¹⁶ Yet, despite lower enrollment and attainment rates, young Latinos are just as likely as other youths to say a college education is important for success in life.

This chapter¹⁷ analyzes educational outcomes for youths using data from the March 2009 Current Population Survey.¹⁸ It also presents findings from the 2009 National Survey of Latinos and other surveys that explore young people's attitudes toward education.

School Enrollment

Nearly half (48.9%) of Latinos ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in either high school or college in March 2009, while 30.6% were enrolled in high school and 20.5% were enrolled in college.

Not being enrolled in school is less common among non-Hispanic youths. Overall, 41.6% of the nation's youths were not enrolled in school. The share of youths not enrolled in either high school or college was 40.4% among whites, 41.5% among blacks and 27.1% among Asians.

¹⁵ [Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox and Provasnik, 2007.](#)

¹⁶ For more background, see the Pew Hispanic Center report "[The Changing Pathways of Hispanic Youths into Adulthood](#)" (Fry, 2009).

¹⁷ Many of the findings in this chapter were presented in a Pew Hispanic Center report, "[Latinos and Education: Explaining the Attainment Gap](#)," published Oct. 7, 2009. That report was prepared for the Latino Children, Families, and Schooling National Conference sponsored jointly by the Education Writers Association, the Pew Hispanic Center and the National Panel on Latino Children and Schooling. The conference was held Oct. 6, 2009 at the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ The CPS-based analysis is restricted to ages 16 to 24 because that is the age range the CPS uses to collect and present data on school enrollment. The estimates in this section will differ slightly from official government estimates, which are typically based on the October 2009 CPS. That is because school enrollment and attainment measures are subject to seasonal fluctuations.

There is little difference between young Hispanics and other youths in the shares enrolled in high school. Just as with young Hispanics, about 30% of all groups of youths are enrolled in high school. However, the share of non-Hispanic youths enrolled in college is higher: 30.4% for whites, 24.6% for blacks and 44.4% for Asians.

Table 6.1
School Enrollment of Youths Ages 16 to 24,
by Race and Ethnicity, March 2009
(%)

	All Youths	Hispanics	Whites	Blacks	Asians
Enrolled in High School	30.2	30.6	29.3	33.9	28.5
Full time	97.8	96.1	98.2	97.9	99.0
Part time	2.2	3.9	1.8	2.1	1.0
Enrolled in College or University	28.2	20.5	30.4	24.6	44.4
Full time	85.3	76.3	87.6	80.6	90.1
Part time	14.7	23.7	12.4	19.4	9.9
Not Enrolled	41.6	48.9	40.4	41.5	27.1

Notes: Estimates are restricted to ages 16 to 24 because that is the universe for the school enrollment data from the Current Population Survey. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Asians includes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders. Numbers may not total due to rounding.
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of data from the March 2009 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Among those enrolled in college, Latino youths are more likely to attend on a part-time basis. Nearly one-in-four (23.7%) Latino college students attend only part time, much higher than the national average of 14.7% and nearly double the rate among whites (12.4%). Almost all youths enrolled in high school attend on a full-time basis.

A primary reason Latino youths trail other youths on enrollment measures is the relatively low rate of school enrollment among the foreign born. Nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of foreign-born Latino youths are not enrolled in either high school or college, compared with 41.6% of all youths. Native-born Latino youths (41.1%), meanwhile, are no more likely than all youths to not be enrolled in either high school or college.

There are two differences in the pattern of school enrollment between native-born Hispanic youths and all youths. First, there are relatively more native-born Hispanic youths in high school—35.3% versus 30.2%—and relatively fewer in college—23.6% versus 28.2%. That is because native-born Hispanics, even within the 16-to-24 cohort, are younger than average. In other words, native-born Hispanics are more likely to be of high school age than college age.

Further, native-born Latino youths, like foreign-born youths, are less likely to be enrolled full time in either college or high school. Some 22.8% of native-born and

27.0% of foreign-born Latino youths in college are part-time students. That compares with 14.7% for all youths.¹⁹

Table 6.2
School Enrollment of Hispanic Youths Ages 16 to 24, by Generation, March 2009
(%)

	All Youths	All Hispanics	Native-born Hispanics	HISPANICS BY GENERATION		
				First	Second	Third and higher
Enrolled in High School	30.2	30.6	35.3	20.6	38.0	31.8
Full time	97.8	96.1	96.1	96.0	96.5	95.5
Part time	2.2	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.5	4.5
Enrolled in College or University	28.2	20.5	23.6	13.7	25.1	21.7
Full time	85.3	76.3	77.2	73.0	74.1	81.8
Part time	14.7	23.7	22.8	27.0	25.9	18.2
Not Enrolled	41.6	48.9	41.1	65.7	36.8	46.5

Notes: Estimates are restricted to ages 16 to 24 because that is the universe for the school enrollment data from the Current Population Survey. First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S. Numbers may not total due to rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of data from the March 2009 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Within the cohort of native-born Latino youths, the children of immigrants, or the second generation, show greater engagement with schooling than the third and higher generations. Only 36.8% of second-generation Latino youths are not enrolled in either high school or college. That share is lower than the share for all youths (41.6%) and the shares of white (40.4%) and black (41.5%) youths who are not enrolled in school. However, among those in college, second-generation young Latinos are more likely than the third and higher generations to attend part time—25.9% versus 18.2%.

Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of youths is difficult to define unambiguously because so many youths ages 16 to 24 are still in the process of completing their schooling. This section presents evidence on three indicators in common use in the education literature. The first is the so-called status dropout rate. That is simply the share of youths who have not received a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate and are not enrolled in school or college.

¹⁹ Also, it is the case that Latino youths are more likely to attend two-year colleges and less likely to attend four-year colleges than other youths ([Fry, 2005](#)).

A second measure is the “status completion rate.” This statistic, used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), measures the high school completion rate for youths ages 18 to 24.²⁰ Age 18 is the lower bound for this measure because most high school graduates have earned the diploma by that age.

	All Youths	Hispanics	Whites	Blacks	Asians
High school dropout rate (ages 16-24)	8.3	17.2	5.7	9.3	3.7
High school completion rate (ages 18-24)	89.7	77.2	93.5	87.3	94.7
College enrollment rate (ages 16-24 with at least a high school diploma)	45.6	38.8	46.4	43.1	66.0

Notes: Estimates are restricted to ages 16 to 24 because that is the universe for the school enrollment data from the Current Population Survey. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Asians includes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of data from the March 2009 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement

The final indicator is a college enrollment rate, the share of those who have finished high school and are enrolled in college. Because this rate is defined only for those with a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, it differs from the enrollment patterns for the entire population of youths as reported in the preceding section.

Latino youths have much higher dropout rates than other youths. In March 2009, some 17.2% of Latino youths had not received a high school diploma or equivalent and were not enrolled in school, compared with only 8.3% of all youths. The dropout rate for Latino youths was nearly twice as high as the rate for black youths (9.3%), three times the rate for white youths (5.7%) and more than four times the rate for Asian youths (3.7%).

Correspondingly, the high school completion rate among Latino youths ages 18 to 24 was much lower than average—77.2% compared with 89.7% for all youths. And among those who have graduated from high school, only 38.8% of Latinos ages 16 to 24 were enrolled in college. That was lower than the rates for all youths (45.6%), whites (46.4%), blacks (43.1%) and Asians (66.0%).

The high dropout rate among Hispanic youths is driven by the foreign born. Some 32.9% of foreign-born Latino youths are high school dropouts. In contrast, 9.9% of native-born Latino youths are high school dropouts. Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, the dropout rate of native-born Latino youths is similar

²⁰ The status completion rate is defined for 18- to 24-year-olds who are no longer enrolled in high school.

to the rate for black youths, but it is nearly double the rate for white youths and almost three times the rate for Asian youths. Notably, the second generation of Latino youths has a lower dropout rate than the third and higher generations—8.5% versus 11.6%.

Foreign-born Latino youths are also the primary reason that the high school completion rate for all Hispanics is below average. The high school completion rate for foreign-born Latino youths ages 18 to 24 is only 60.3%, well below the rate for native-born young Latinos (87.0%). The second generation of Latino youths has a high school completion rate of 89.1%, higher than the third and higher generations and matching the national completion rate, but trailing the white completion rate of 93.5%.

Likewise, there is not a large difference between native-born Hispanics and other youths in the shares of high school completers who are enrolled in college. Some 42.7% of native-born Hispanic high school completers are enrolled in college, compared with 45.6% of all youths and 46.4% of white youths. Among native-born Hispanics, the college enrollment rate is higher among the second generation than among third and higher generations—46.2% versus 38.3%. Foreign-born Latino youths have the lowest college enrollment rate (29.1%) and account for the relatively low enrollment rate observed for all Hispanics.

	All Youths	All Hispanics	Native-born Hispanics	HISPANICS BY GENERATION		
				First	Second	Third and higher
High school dropout rate (ages 16-24)	8.3	17.2	9.9	32.9	8.5	11.6
High school completion rate (ages 18-24)	89.7	77.2	87.0	60.3	89.1	84.4
College enrollment rate (ages 16-24 with at least a high school diploma)	45.6	38.8	42.7	29.1	46.2	38.3

Notes: Estimates are restricted to ages 16 to 24 because that is the universe for the school enrollment data from the Current Population Survey. First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.

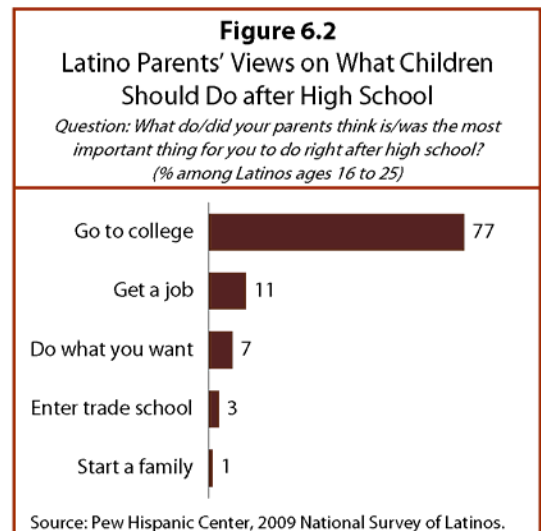
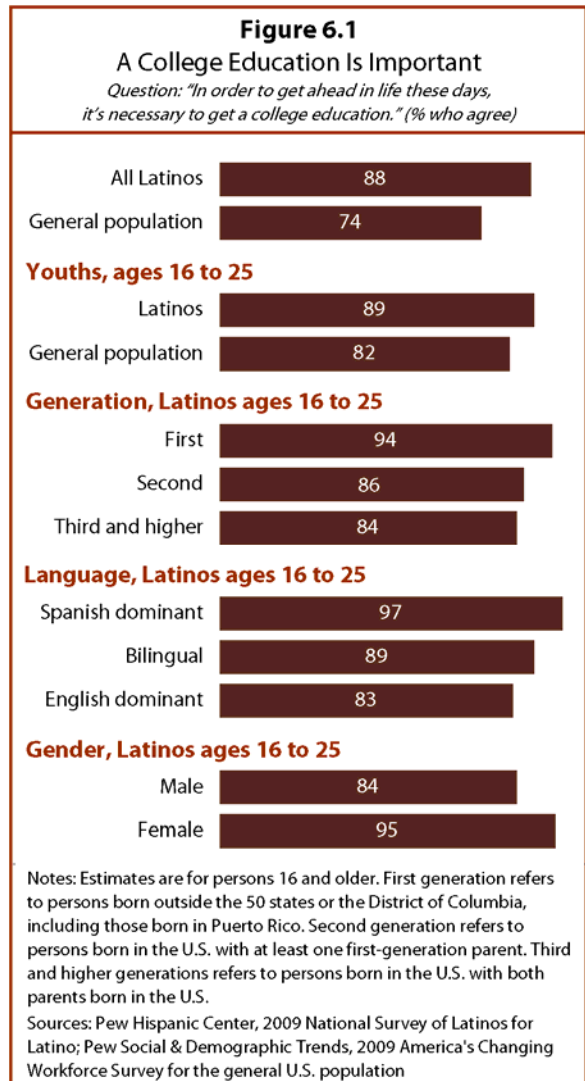
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of data from the March 2009 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement

The Importance of Education

Despite their relatively low high school completion and college enrollments rates, nearly all young Latinos believe that it is necessary to have a college education to get ahead in life. According to the 2009 National Survey of Latinos, fully 89% of young Hispanics say this, similar to the share of all young people (82%) ([Pew Social & Demographic Trends, 2009](#)). Moreover, all Hispanics ages 16 and older are more likely than the overall U.S. population ages 16 and older to agree that a college degree is important for getting ahead in life—88% versus 74%.

There are small differences on this question by nativity, language use and gender. Foreign-born young Latinos are more likely than second- or third-generation young Latinos to say a college education is important—94% versus 86% and 84%, respectively. Nearly all (97%) Spanish-dominant young Latinos say a college education is important, compared with 89% of bilingual youths and 83% of English-dominant young Latinos. Also, there is a gender gap on this question: fully 95% of young Hispanic females agree that a college education is important for success, compared with 84% of Hispanics males who say that.

Latino youths are not the only ones to place a great emphasis on a college education; so do their parents. More than three-quarters (77%) of Latinos ages 16 to 25 say their parents think going to college is the most important thing for them to do after high school. Just 11% report that their parents think the most important thing for them to do after high school is to get a full-time job.



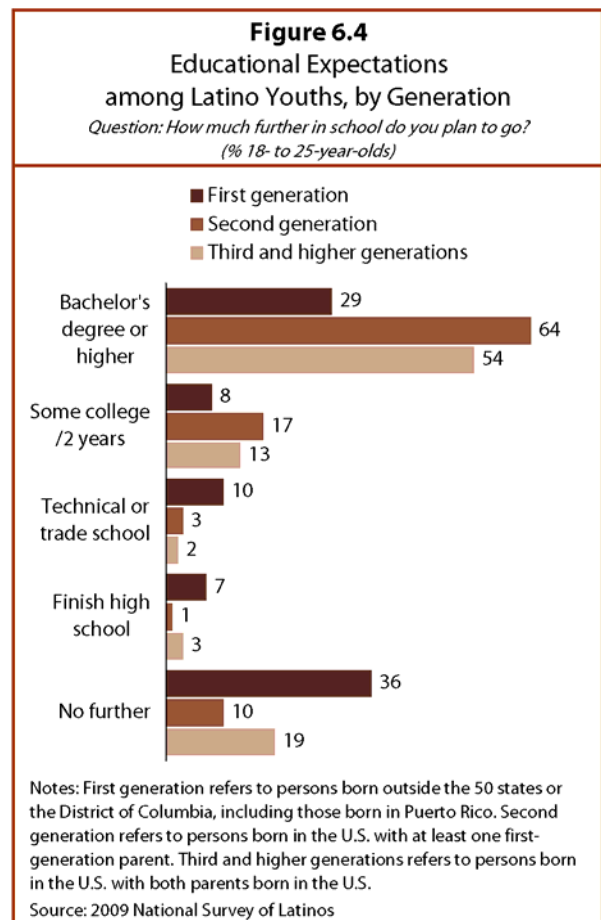
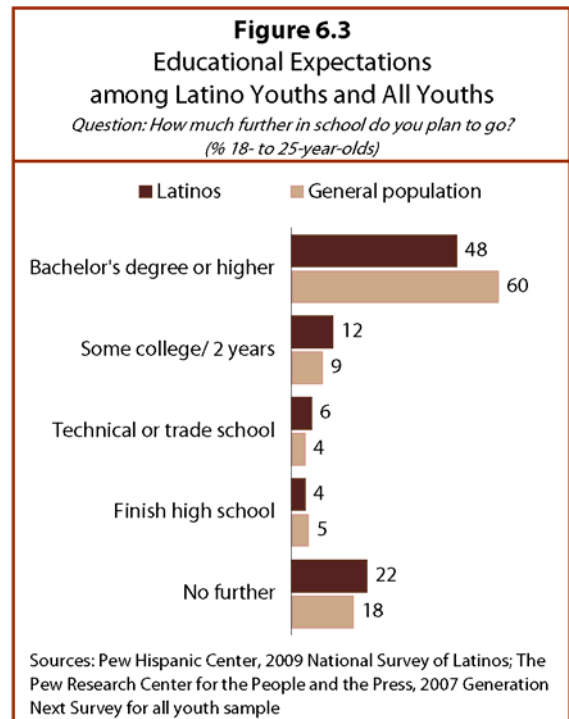
Educational Expectations

The value that young Latinos place on a college education is not nearly matched by their own personal expectations for educational advancement. Some 48% of young Latinos ages 18 to 25 say they expect to get a college degree or more, compared with 60% of the overall U.S. population of non-Hispanic youths ages 18 to 25.²¹

This gap is largely explained by the relatively low educational expectations of young immigrant Latinos. Fewer than one-in-three (29%) say they plan to get a bachelor’s degree or more, compared with 64% of second-generation Latino youths and 54% of the third and higher generations.

A similar gap appears between young Latinos who primarily speak Spanish and those who are bilingual or who primarily speak English. About one-quarter (24%) of Spanish-dominant young Latinos say they plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree or more, while about half (49%) of bilingual young Latinos and more than six-in-ten (62%) English-dominant young Latinos say the same. Along these same lines, more than four-in-ten (41%) Spanish-dominant young Latinos ages 18 to 25 say they have no further plans to continue in school. One-in-five (20%) of bilingual young Latinos and 13% of English-dominant young Latinos say the same.

Plans to continue in school are closely related to the current enrollment status of young Latinos ages 16 to 25. Among Latino youths who are currently enrolled in high



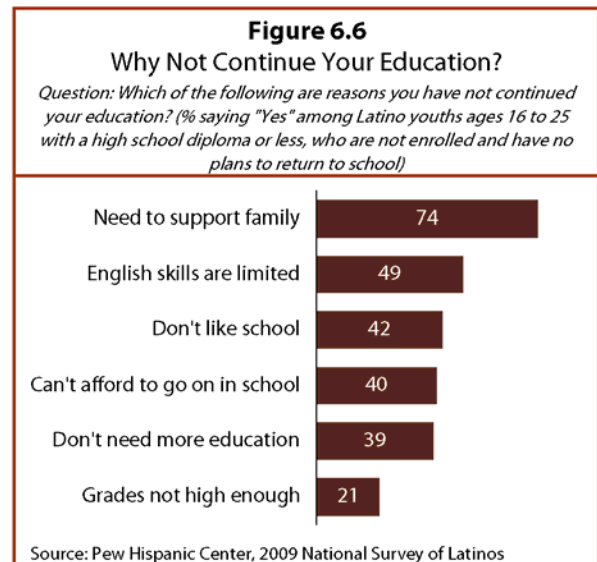
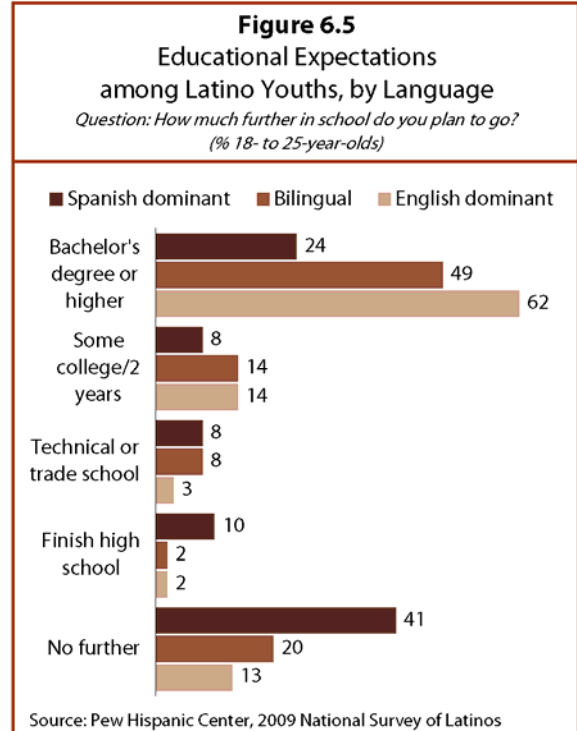
²¹ For more background on the general U.S. young adult population ages 18 to 25, see the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press report “[How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics: A Portrait of ‘Generation Next’](#)” (2007).

school, nearly six-in-ten (57%) say they plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree or more, while just 15% say finishing high school is as far as they plan to go in school. Among Latino youths who are currently in college, 87% say they plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree or more. Among Latinos ages 16 to 25 who are not currently enrolled in school, nearly three-in-ten (29%) say they plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree or more. However, 38% say they do not plan to return to school.

Why Don’t Young Latinos Continue Their Education?

The biggest reason for the gap between the high value Latinos place on education and their more modest expectations to finish college appears to come from financial pressure to support a family. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of all 16- to 25-year-old survey respondents who cut their education short during or right after high school say they did so because they had to support their family. Other reasons include poor English skills (cited by about half of respondents who cut short their education), a dislike of school and a feeling that they don’t need more education for the careers they want (each cited by about four-in-ten respondents who cut their education short).

The foreign born make up 34% of all Latino youths, and they are much more likely than native-born Latino youths to be supporting or helping to support a family, either in the U.S. or in their native country. In 2007, 29% of all immigrant female Hispanics ages 16 to 25 were mothers, compared with 17% of native-born female Hispanics and 12% of white females (Fry, 2009). In addition, nearly two-thirds (64%) of all immigrant Hispanics ages 18 to 25 say they send remittances to family members in their country of origin, compared with just 21% of their U.S. born counterparts (Lopez, Livingston and Kochhar, 2009). In short,



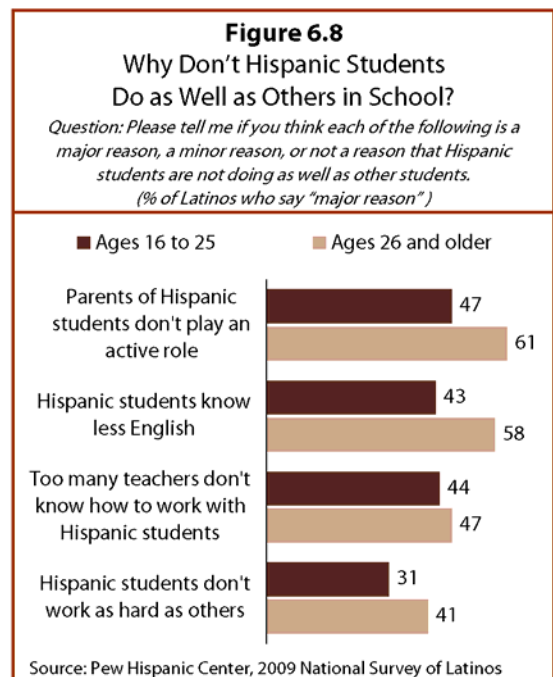
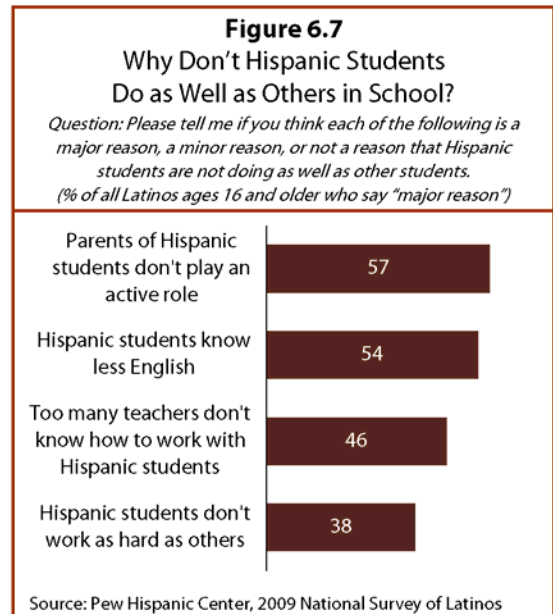
young immigrant Hispanics appear to have financial commitments that limit their ability to pursue more education, even though they see a college education as important for success in life.

The Latino Education Achievement Gap

Not only are young Hispanics less likely than all young people to be enrolled in high school or college, but Latinos who are in middle school or high school have a significant gap in reading and mathematics achievement compared with white and Asian students, according to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.²²

When asked a question that presented a number of possible reasons that Latinos do not do as well as other students in school, more respondents blamed poor parenting and poor English skills than blamed poor teachers. The explanation that Latino students don't work as hard as other students was cited by the fewest survey respondents; some 38% see that as a major reason for the achievement gap.

There are differences by age in several of these attitudes. For example, 61% of older Latinos (ages 26 and older) say the failure of parents to play an active role in helping their children succeed in school is a major reason for Latino students' lagging educational achievement, compared with less than half (47%) of Latino youths who feel that way.



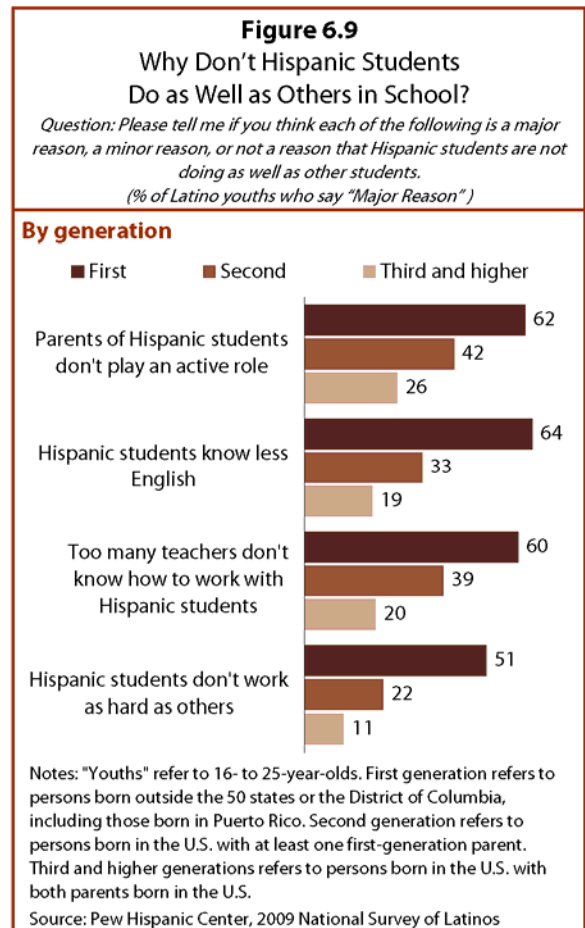
²² According to the National Center for Education Statistics, among eighth-graders, a smaller share of Hispanic students (15%) than non-Hispanic white (39%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (40%) students scored at or above proficient on the reading assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2005. On the 2005 mathematics assessment of the NAEP, among eighth-graders, a smaller percentage of Hispanic (13%) students than non-Hispanic white (39%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (47%) students scored at or above proficient levels ([Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox and Provasnik, 2007](#)). Among high school twelfth-graders in 2008, Hispanic students scored 9% lower than non-Hispanic white students on the NAEP reading assessment, and Hispanic students scored 7% lower than non-Hispanic white students on the NAEP mathematics assessment ([Planty et al., 2009](#)).

In addition, nearly six-in-ten (58%) older Latinos say the limited English skills of Hispanic students is a major reason; some 43% of Latino youths agree.

Older Latinos are also more likely than young Latinos to say Hispanic students not working as hard as other students is a major reason that Hispanics students are not doing as well in school as other students—41% versus 31%.

Immigrant young Latinos are about as likely as adult Latinos to blame parents, the English skills of Hispanic students, and student themselves for the poor academic performance of Hispanic students. For example, 62% of immigrant youths say parents of Hispanics students are a major reason that Hispanic students do not do as well in school as others, similar to the share (61%) of older Latinos who say the same.

Yet foreign-born young Latinos are more likely than second- or third-generation young Latinos to identify parents, the English skills of Hispanic students, teachers, and Hispanics students themselves for the poor performance of Hispanics students relative to other groups. More than half (51%) of immigrant young Latinos say Hispanics students not working as hard as others is a major reason that Hispanic students do not do as well in school as others. This is more than twice the share (22%) of second-generation young Latinos, and nearly five times the share (11%) of third-generation young Latinos who say the same.



“Parents expect so much and it gets...overwhelming. You have to support your family and take care of your brothers and sisters... [and] some people gotta grow up [quick and] basically never really have a childhood.”

15-year-old Hispanic male

“Our parents are exhausted every time they come home. They don't have time to be ‘oh you need help with your homework?’”

21-year-old Hispanic male