

Community Brief

How Latino Youth Benefit from Supportive Adults: Lessons for Youth Providers

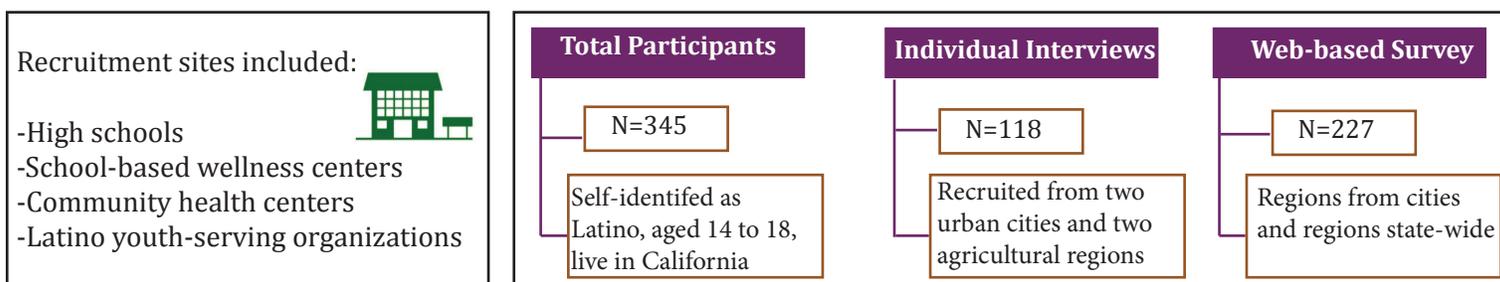
The Issue

Latino youth are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States and will become a major portion of our future leadership and workforce. The last decade has seen the most dramatic and admirable changes in the educational and reproductive health accomplishments among Latino youth in the United States. In 2012, more Latino youth were enrolled in college compared to white youth (70% versus 67%, respectively)¹ and Latinas' teen birth rates in California dropped by an extraordinary 18.6 births per thousand from 61.3 in 2008 to 42.7 in 2011².

Latino youth have high aspirations for career success and regard the adults in their lives as central to helping them achieve their goals and tend to look toward those adults for support. "Support" is expressed by youth as the desire for connection and guidance related to both academic and personal concerns. Research highlights that simply feeling that people around you are supportive (defined as perceived social support), has the potential to improve youth's academic achievement, goal orientation, and self-confidence³. It also suggests that the presence of social support (or absence of it) can trigger positive or negative experiences and motivational beliefs which in turn influence achievement. Relationships with adults that build meaningful connections are critical protective assets in the lives of youth and we must continue to ensure that adult support is accessible to our youth of today.

What our Study Did*

Latino-identified youth living in California gave voice to their experiences through individual interviews and a web-based survey. In the interviews, we explored their experiences as Latino youth, the presence and absence of discrimination, access to sexual and reproductive health services and resources, their goals and aspirations, and what helps them succeed.



What We Learned

The majority of Latino youth had high educational aspirations and reported intentional sexual decision-making linked to future aspirations, such as purposefully using contraceptives to avoid unintended pregnancies in order to complete high school and attend college. We found that support systems play a key role in enabling youth to actualize their goals and aspirations. Youth identified self-support mechanisms as well as external support sources.

Self-Support

Youth described support from themselves through self-determination and encouragement based motivation. Many youth want to defy the negative stereotypes and are working hard to become successful in their lives despite the many structural challenges they face.

“He [my mentor] also wants me to get out of there and just shoot higher, get higher than he has gone and anybody has gone... like to be that person that you want to be.”
-Latino boy, agricultural region

External Support

Youth identified various sources of social support including: friends, siblings, parents and extended family members, teachers, and adults from youth-based program. Overall, youth articulated the importance of adults as a source of positive reinforcement, encouragement for higher education and motivation to pursue their professional and personal goals and aspirations. For youth who are also connected to services and resources, they identified providers as key mentors and role models. Youth access to positive role models and adults who empower them play a significant role in promoting positive self-image.



“Like a lot of people are, um, they’re held back from their full potential just because they think they can’t make it, just because the society tells them, you know like statistics and what not they tell them that Hispanics don’t graduate or that they don’t go to college or they just have babies at an early age. Um, for me I just feel like that that’s just a drive, it makes me want to succeed even more...”
- Latina girl, urban city

Gaps

- Youth providers are critical and play a significant role in the lives of youth; however, youth don’t know how to access them. Youth generally lack knowledge of resources and are unaware of how to access services available to them.
- There is an overall absence of support from adults related to sexual health. Youth hardly ever mentioned having had providers advise them on issues related to sexual health or inform them about available sexual health resources.

“We [my boyfriend and I] were gonna go to Planned Parenthood but we were always scared. We didn’t know what they would ask, or what would they say.”
- Latina girl, agricultural region

What You Can Do as Youth Providers

- Programs and resources are central to youth development and help prepare and secure youth leaders. Educate legislators on why youth programs are needed and encourage them to advocate for youth resources and services.
- It is important to identify youth that are not engaged in programs and connect them to youth-based services and resources. Ensure youth are aware of local resources and informed about their educational and sexual health rights.
- Never allow adults to discourage youth from their potential. The absence of support and negative messaging can be detrimental to positive youth development and can adversely impact their ability to succeed. Always support youth no matter what their goals and aspirations may be.

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Says Who

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013, April 17). College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2012 High School Graduates. USDL-13-0670. [News release].
2. California Department of Public Health. (2013). California teen birth rates, 1991-2011 [Data slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/mcah/Documents/MO-MCAH-2011TBR-DataSlides.pdf>
3. Ahmed, W., Minnaert, A., Werf, G., & Kuyper, H. (2010). Perceived social support and early adolescents’ achievement: The mediational role of motivational beliefs and emotions. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39, 36-46. doi 10.1007/s10964-008-9367-7

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