Alternatives to the School-to-Prison Pipeline:
The Role of Educational Leaders in Developing a College-Going Culture

Eugene Fujimoto
Yvonne Garcia
Noemy Medina
Eduardo Perez
California State University, Fullerton

Abstract

As the largest and fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the country, Latin@ educational success is a national priority. In the Los Angeles Unified School district, the country's largest, high school graduation rates for Latin@s hover at near 40%. Examining this institutional and societal tragedy through the school-to-prison pipeline has yielded crucial insights. Less understood are alternatives to the school-to-prison pipeline and the vital role of educational leaders. This qualitative study of principals and counselors in Southeast Los Angeles schools asks: What is the relationship between the 'school-to-prison pipeline' and the lacking of a 'college going culture' in underserved communities? How do educational leaders perceive their role in creating a "college-going culture" in largely underserved, under-resourced communities? Among the findings is the continued existence of deficit explanations of school failure and the need for school-community partnerships to move toward more asset-based frameworks.

Introduction

The school-to-prison pipeline is the collection of education and public safety policies and practices that push our nation's school children out of the classroom and into the streets, the juvenile justice system, or the criminal justice system (Archer, 2009, p. 868). As our public education system continues to be under intense scrutiny, pressure to increase graduation rates becomes a focal point. Nationwide, 68% of students who enter the 9th grade make it to graduation four years later (Orfield, Losen, & Wald, 2004). In urban areas with high concentrations of low-income and communities of color, the rates are substantially lower. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, the largest in the country, the four-year graduation rate is 46.4%. Within this rate, 48% of African Americans and 40% of Latin@s graduate (Orfield, Losen, & Wald, 2004).

When juxtaposed against this failure to educate our youth, examination of our juvenile and criminal justice system reveal alarming data. In a 2006-07 study of incarcerated 16-24 year olds, those who dropped out (or stopped out) of high school were 63 times more likely to be institutionalized than those with four-year college degrees (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). It is this linkage between those who are not making it through our educational system and ending up incarcerated by the state that has drawn attention as the "school-to-prison pipeline".

Increasingly prevalent is research about the relationship between schools and prisons as social institutions that contribute to societal inequities (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). This includes studies of media-driven, fear-based responses that result in stricter disciplinary policies and practices that have had disproportionate punitive effect on low-income Black and Brown students (Fowler, 2011). Studies have also looked at schools that have been successful in providing alternatives to "over-policing" (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2009).

A report entitled "Safety with Dignity" looked at over 100 schools in New York City serving students with similar demographics. The New York Civil Liberties Union (2009) examined these schools based on twelve indicators of success. These criteria included high school graduation rates; level and types of crimes committed in school; average daily attendance; and suspension and expulsion rates. Also among success indicators were the percentages of students planning to attend 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities. The results categorized schools into "successful schools", "permanent metal detector schools", and "impact schools." (The latter were

schools with high crime rates targeted for increased policing by the NYPD).

The "successful schools" scored highest on the twelve success indicators, and had developed alternatives to zero-tolerance, increased policing procedures. These alternatives included peer-mediated student conflicts; students involved in establishing and enforcing school rules; and individualized attention to issues that students faced.

This NYCLU (2009) report showed that when the seven "successful schools" that used no metal detectors were compared to the 89 "permanent metal detector schools" and the 12 "impact schools", "successful schools" rated higher in nearly all indicators, including students planning to attend college. Seventy percent of students from "successful schools" had college aspirations; compared to 58% of students from "permanent metal detector schools," and 45% of the students in "impact schools" (NYCLU, 2009, p. 22).

The premise behind the present study is: developing a college-going culture can interrupt the school to prison pipeline that has engulfed so many school systems. And, as reaffirmed by the NYCLU (2009) findings, there are few, if any, more important factors in interrupting this pipeline, than the role of school leaders. The findings support not only the notion that the development of a college-going culture is a core component of a successful school and interrupting the school to prison pipeline, but that leadership is one of the most important factors in influencing a school's culture and climate.

In this context, this research attempts to extend our understanding of these questions: What is the relationship between the 'school-to-prison pipeline' and the lacking of a 'college going culture' in underserved communities? Is the development of a college-going culture a legitimate alternative to interrupting the 'school-to-prison pipeline' in urban communities of color? Through the eyes of school leaders in the largest school district in the country, Los Angeles Unified School District, this qualitative study of 8 school principals and 3 counselors hopes to answer these questions:

1. What is the role of educational leaders in moving toward a college-going culture?
2. How do educational leaders perceive their role in creating a college-going culture in largely underserved, under-resourced communities?

What follows is an explanation of the theoretical foundation for this study; a literature review; the methods used to collect the data; the results of our interviews; and a discussion and analysis of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

Rooted in critical legal studies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in response to the historical inability of our system of jurisprudence to effectively understand and adjudicate cases of racial inequality (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Branching to other fields, including education (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2012), CRT is a vital analytical tool in examining educational inequalities. Particularly relevant for this study, is the CRT tenet that institutional racism is a "normal" and embedded aspect of everyday life in the U.S. While supported both historically and in the current day, this study presumes that the school-to-prison pipeline is but another manifestation of this racial reality. Moreover, CRT introduces us to important concepts that help explain how we have arrived at and continue to maintain systems of inequality, both individually and on an institutional level. One of these concepts is essentialism, which is used to create a story or idea about an entire group of people based on experiences of a few (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a result of these socializations, any successful attempts to interrupt this racial inequality must be intentional and systemic (Harro, 2012).

Along with CRT, a critique of the genetic and cultural deficit explanations for the academic failure of low-income students of color (Valencia, 1997) is part of the analysis used in this study. This critique has increased understanding of the ways in which schools have historically and systematically attempted to "deculturalize" students of color through educational processes (Spring, 2010). Freire (1973) contends that communities in the margins of society are not only perceived as deficient but receive "deposits" of dominant ideologies, which they are expected to accept and model without question. Moreover, this "banking" method of education establishes norms based on a dominant culture, which then deepens the gulf between educational institutions and the low-

income, communities of color they purport to serve. "Funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), for example, is evidence of the ignored history of "cultural and cognitive resources" (p. 134) present in Latin@ homes. Subsequently, the need to effectively bridge the chasm between schools and communities has taken on increasing importance.

Yosso (2005) proceeded to utilize Critical Race Theory and the work of Freire to identify forms of "community cultural wealth". Guided by CRT, Yosso (2005; 2006) reframes common, deficit-based misperceptions of communities of color, while introducing alternative forms of capital, such as linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital, that are often rooted in urban communities, but remain ignored or denied by dominant cultural norms and ideologies (Yosso, 2005). This asset-based approach to marginalized communities is of particular importance as we engage the participants of this study in conversations about their community's cultural wealth. Using an analytical framework based on community cultural wealth allows us to understand these communities as sites of cultural richness and potential and at the same time uncovering how "ordinary" and institutionalized racism and dominant ideologies can distract us from seeing the assets each community possesses (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Literature Review

The school-to-prison pipeline grew out of public concerns regarding juvenile delinquency. Characterizations were fed by popular media through terms such as "youth predators" and claims of out-of-control crime in schools (Fowler, 2011). According to Fowler (2011), these often unwarranted concerns continued through widespread publicity centering on relatively few isolated incidents of extreme school violence, such as the mass shooting in Columbine, Chardon, and Taft Union High School. This perpetuated growing fears that ultimately led to zero-tolerance discipline policies (Turner & Goodner, 2010).

Criminalization of Youth of Color

Many states have shifted policies and practices toward criminalizing student behavior (Fowler, 2011). Student discipline is moving from the principal's office to the courts (Turner & Goodner, 2010). Such disciplinary practices can remove students from the educational environment and prematurely introduce them to the criminal justice system. Archer (2009) examined student experiences with the criminal justice system and found the following: children who are removed from the academic environment are more likely to have future experiences with the criminal justice system; this directs children on a path that often ends in incarceration; and the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately impacts schools with high percentages of low-socioeconomic and underrepresented student populations.

Another trend that demonstrates the shift toward criminalization of youth of color is that most states have created policies that move juveniles to adult courts (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005). Heitzeg (2009) maintains that the juvenile justice system has moved rehabilitative reform to an institution that has created a "second-class criminal court" absent of therapy or justice. New policies have dismantled the original belief that courts were to protect youth from adult justice systems (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005). In essence, juveniles are less likely to have access to the rehabilitation that is needed to escape the prison pathway. Also noted is that youth from urban communities of color are feeling the effects of such policy changes at disproportionately higher rates (Archer, 2009; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005). Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera (2005) noted that between 1985 and 1990 the number of minority youth incarcerated under age 18 increased by almost 10% while the incarceration rates for White youth declined by 11%.

More recent data shows continued disparities in treatment based on race, as "Black and Hispanic juveniles represented about one-half of California's juvenile population age 10 through 17 in 2005, but they accounted for almost two-thirds of juvenile arrests" (Legislative Analysts Office, 2007). The effect of these practices has resulted in large numbers of Latin@s serving prison time. In 2010, 345,900 Latin@s were serving sentences in both state and federal prisons. In the same year, the California Attorney General's Office (2010) reported 22,273 Latin@ juveniles in detention. This is equivalent to 51% of the total youth housed in detention facilities in California.

Data compiled in the fastest emerging Latin@ immigrant communities displayed a trend of low-achievement and high dropout rates among Latin@ students (Wainer, 2004). Garcia-Reid (2007) notes that Latina females in particular, are disproportionately dropping out at greater rates than their non-Latina counterparts. According to Heitzeg (2009), elevated dropout rates impact the school-to-prison pipeline coinciding with Wald and Losen's (2003) findings on the educational attainment of those in the correctional system. These findings include that the largest predictor for females in the criminal justice system was disciplinary action during middle school.

Some educational decision-makers make the assumption that zero-tolerance policies should control and contain youth to preserve the general public safety (Polakow-Suransky, 2000). Even as youth crime declines, public fear of urban youth has contributed to harsher youth policies (Ginwright, Cammarrota, & Noguera, 2005), and less attention to the creation of a college-going culture. More research is needed on how educational decision makers see their role in providing needed alternatives such as a focus on higher education for all youth.

Methods

Twenty-four educational and community leaders were interviewed during spring 2011. For this study, we focused on 11 educational leaders, including principals and academic counselors of both public and private local elementary, middle and high schools. Schools were selected based on their proximity to the predominantly Latin@ communities in Southeast Los Angeles. Interviewees responded to an inquiry for leaders to participate in this study. The 13 remaining participants were elected officials, clergy members and community members. Only educational leader interviews were used for this analysis as researchers believe educators' work and perceptions of their educational leadership are directly relevant to the interruption of the school-to-prison pipeline. Participants consisted of 6 males and 5 females. In regard to their ethnic background, individuals identified as Latin@ or Hispanic (n = 5), Mexican or Mexican-American (n = 4), and multi-ethnic (n = 2).

Interviews were conducted by faculty and research assistants using a semi-structured interview protocol. The questions focused on: leader's perceptions of the issues impinging upon their students' academic success; influences on their students' likelihood to attend college; and recommendations toward the establishment of a college-going culture. For example, participants were asked, "What do you believe guides and contribute to students' academic success in your community? What is your responsibility in this process?" and "How do you define success? How do youth in your community define success? How important do you think college degree attainment is for youth?"

All participants were recruited via emails and phone calls. Consents were obtained in-person at the start of the interview and verbal consent was given for audio recording. One participant declined consent to be audio-recorded. For this interview, analysis was completed using contemporaneous notes that were taken during discussion. All audio-recorded interviews were then professionally transcribed. Notes and transcriptions were analyzed using an open-coding software, ATLAS.ti. Two faculty members and one research assistant coded interviews and established an inter-coder agreement which allowed for control of inter-rater reliability (Creswell, 2007). The major codes emerged as reflected in the Results section. Thereafter, member checks were completed as transcripts were sent to participant in order to ensure data accuracy (Creswell, 2007). Participants noted minor changes.

Results

Educational leaders in this study were asked about their role in creating a college-going culture within the low-income, Latina/o communities in which they worked. Their responses are presented here in four thematic areas: 1) The immediate needs in the schools; 2) Expectations of students and possibilities; 3) The relationship between the educational leaders and the community; and 4) Being stakeholders versus change agents.

Need to Focus on Immediate Needs

When asked about their roles as educational leaders, several of the principals focused on the immediate

student needs that make up a significant part of their responsibilities. These student needs ranged from the basic, physical human needs of food and clothing to the emotional needs of family trauma and death, to students helping their families pay the monthly bills. Yvette, a principal at an elementary school reported:

> [I]t's really hard to. . . talk to a child about college when they don't even have a backpack and crayons, and so it's really difficult for us here at the elementary level to—to have kids look so far into the future. It's so hard because it's about today. I'm more worried about today and next week. Look, I've got boxes of shoes over there because I have kids that don't have shoes. I can't talk to them about college that's in eight years when I don't have a pair of shoes to wear. So, we really focus on today, (laughs) the next two weeks and—getting kids—when they're in the fifth grade we—we even talk about getting through middle school.

The low socioeconomic levels of the families in the area are clearly evident here. The challenge in creating a college-going mindset when basic needs are unmet is obviously complex. And this type of problem is not just physical needs, but helping children and families get through emotional hardships as well. Monica, another elementary school principal, grew up and still lives close to the community she serves. She relates strongly to the children and community, and has become known as "the savior of all". She shares one of her experiences:

> One of the kids that's coming today, his father passed away. He's in third grade… They're owners. . .of this Mexican restaurant. He hasn't been . . . doing his homework and Mom's working a lot. Today I told her that this was unacceptable. I have the referral on my desk. The teacher has been working with her, and he's still forgetting the homework. . . I told her, 'I have this (referral), but if you need help I'm here for you. . . . Don't feel guilty that you're not there. If he knows that he's going to be here with me until he's done, I bet you he's going to get it done. So feel free to use me.

For other principals, the present issues become even more pressing because of the lack of staff to support their efforts. Shawna, a former assistant principal for eight years recently became the principal of the same school. A promotion for Shawna has become a mixed blessing, as the assistant principal position was eliminated. This leaves her and three coordinators in charge of everything from instruction to everyday operations. Shawna says she "has the energy" to play a more active role in creating a college-going culture, but does not have the resources. This leaves her spending most of her time on "operations" or "safety" issues.

The educational leaders also related the issues of high school students and their immediate needs. All of the leaders affirmed that financial issues are a primary obstacle for students attending college. This takes various forms. One is the more obvious inability to pay for rising tuition costs. Principal Lucia says:

> Parents come to us and say, 'Well, how in the world can I pay for college if my child is supposed to go to college? There is no money for college.' I think people actually see it that way. That [a college education is for the] privileged because it depends on what your economic status is.

Another perception shared by the leaders is the students who see their role as contributing to the family income. In the immediate, this is perceived to be an obstacle to a college-going culture, as many students consider getting a job out of high school as the priority. Christian, a college and school career counselor, shared his view of who the students are that are unlikely to make it to college:

> [B]asically a student that is living for the here and now and is not really thinking about the future… there's probably a lot of community or home issues that are affecting—when he comes to school . . . upset and not really ready to learn and his mind is probably concerned about something else, . . .—I think that would be your at-risk student. When you have teenage moms, when you have teenage boys that the girlfriend is expecting—these are some of the things that are affecting what happens to them here at school.

Principal Charlie shared similar sentiments when he stated:

> [T]he family, the Hispanic community a lot of times, they're hurting for their support and some of their parents want their kids to, soon as they graduate from high school, get a job to help support the family.

These perceptions by educational leaders are evidence that their work is in many ways determined by a sense of immediacy and the prioritization of meeting current needs as they arise. The perception that under-achieving students and their families are psychologically and situationally prone to the need for more immediate gratification can also affect the leaders' level of student expectation and limit what may be deemed possible from the students and the school from their positions as leaders.

Expectations and Possibilities

For some educational leaders, consistently being faced with the need to respond to immediate needs and at times crisis situations of their students appears to have resulted in lowered expectations of the students. For example, Principal Alex, defines success for his students as a high school diploma. Merna, a high school counselor, defined success for her students to becoming "productive members of society" and that for students who do not choose college, "just helping them, whether it be a trade school or application . . . something that they want to learn that's going to help them get a better job."

Two of the principals discussed the influence of materialism and how youth define success by making money and purchasing a particular lifestyle. Often this is not connected to educational goals. A number of the leaders talked about the goal of "survival" for the students and families who are struggling financially.

Interestingly, in spite of the immediate needs of the students and families they serve, a number of the leaders in this study displayed a remarkable ability to continue to express the belief that all students can learn, and all students have the potential to be college graduates. Monica states:

> So success is, number one, instilling the belief that you can learn, that you can do, and that you have – it's about what you put in it. You come in having all those tools. Use them. So as teachers and as personnel, we're just helping them grow and blossom because they have it.

There is an important level of optimism expressed here, with the caution to not fall into a level of "hokey hope" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) that fails to recognize real societal limitations based on race and class. Richard, a principal at one of the largest middle schools in the country and a former principal at a large local high school, appeared able to maintain a more "critical" level of hope. While he acknowledged that two-thirds of the students in his school were not on track to attend college, he expressed belief that all of his students had the potential and ability to be college graduates. When he was asked if the large percentage of those not planning to attend college was based in cultural factors, he responded:

> I think it's more a social thing because I ask the kids all the time, "Where are your parents from?" and a vast majority of the parents were not born here, so they were laborers...and a lot of the mothers are at home. So the experience of higher education for the majority of the kids isn't the parents' background, so they don't know exactly how to push or when to push the kids in that direction.

Richard believed that these two-thirds of the students were largely helping their families to survive. And his recognition of the levels of poverty, issues of social and cultural capital, and societally-based limitations is important.

Walking this fine line between recognizing the significant social, racial and economic barriers that their students face, while maintaining a sense of "critical hope" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) is no easy task. (The limitations that this can place on the potential for leaders to move to a place of possibility will be discussed in the Conclusion section.) How do these expectations and sense of possibility for their students that are tempered by a dose of

reality, effect the leaders relationship with the community they serve?

Relationship Between Leaders and Community

Educational leaders had mixed information about available resources in the community. They also expressed a lack of clarity about their relationship and the school's relationship with the community. There appears to be a perceived barrier between the community and the schools. Principal Lucia stated in response to a question regarding the schools-community relationship:

We just had . . . three. . . days of professional development with different groups of teachers. And we actually thought…because we sometimes… can't control what's beyond these walls, we can only control what's inside these walls. So we have been working together as…a professional learning community so that together we can… look… at academic success…So, we're looking at how do we get as many children to learn as possible given their different backgrounds? And so we can't control those things that are outside of our school. Some of those things are good and some of those things are not so good. And even the things that aren't good, we still have to work to try and get every child to learn.

This perceived barrier of what is "inside these walls" and what is in the community is an important perception to understand vis a vis the student and family experience. While there is a commonly held perception that many parents lack adequate knowledge or awareness about college, parents and the rest of the community are not often invited to engage in events or activities that foster a college-going culture. Merna emphasizes the point:

[U]nfortunately, a lot of the parents … don't have, a high level of education, so even though they—know that education is important, they don't understand, what SAT's or ACT scores are—what financial aid is--- . . . [Another] obstacle we face with those—and it may be a few parents, but, because they're very family oriented they want the students—they're like, okay, 'I'm fine with you going to college, attending college, but why don't you go and commute?' And so, I think it's important for students to really, spend their first year on campus just so that they have that college experience, and if they choose to, move out, after and move back home, that's fine. But, it's very important—but it's very hard to—to get parents to accept that, that—and with the meeting, we did have some parents, you know, say, 'Okay.'"

Christian explains the problem from his view:
I think there is (sic) a variety of different programs available for the kids. It's just a matter of them participating in the various programs.

Monica states:
For those boys and girls that are not successful, with my experience at my school, the parents are absent. I'm not saying physically absent, but absent from giving education that importance that is needed.

The most commonly stated activities by educational leaders that could foster a college-going culture were college fairs and visits to campuses. Some mentioned a desire to be sponsored by a university, which would bring resources to assist the students in attending college. Others mentioned individual efforts by teachers to focus on college and school efforts to have all teachers wear their college shirts on a college day to show students where they attended school. One principal recommended the development of a college fair with a collaboration between educational leaders and community members. This was one of the few activities mentioned that would appear to cross the barrier between school and community. This raised questions about the degree to which the leaders were invested in the development of the community. To what degree do the leaders see themselves as stakeholders in the educational effort?

Stakeholders Versus Change Agents

The educational leaders were asked who the stakeholders were in the goal of creating a college-going culture. Many articulated students, parents, teachers and administrators as stakeholders. The degree of their investment likely varied depending on a variety of circumstances. The fact that 10 of the 11 leaders were of Latino or Mexican-origin is not insignificant. The investment to serve those with which you feel a connection is an important factor. However, the diversity within the Latina/o population also plays a role. Diversity based on class, gender, citizenship status, language, culture, generation in the U.S., are key factors in the ability to understand and relate to the population being served. Additionally, proximity of the location of residence likely plays a role in the degree of investment as well.

For example, Monica grew up in the local area of her school, and continues to live in a nearby community. This connection would imply a strong investment in the success of the students and the community. Shawna lived for 20 years in the community in which she now works, but moved to a city 20 miles away. Her investment is likely still significant, but tempered by her home and family being a distance away. Richard, although obviously invested in the students and his role as a leader, resides in a beach community in commuting distance to his school. The degree of his investment is likely influenced by his residing in another community as well.

An indicator of the sense of common mission and goals for both community and school can come from an analysis of the use of language by the educational leaders. Several of the leaders consistently used the term "they" or "them" when referring to the community. For example, Shawna stated:

> Well, one way would be to have college fairs and invite the parents and the community. And in planning it, *they* could plan with the educational leaders as well for the elementary schools in the community, the middle schools, the high schools (emphasis added).

In other settings of a collaborative nature, the more common pronoun would be "we" when referring to a joint effort. The use of "they" is also evident in a number of the quotes used earlier in the Results section.

While there is clear indication of the leaders claiming themselves as stakeholders in the creation of a college-going culture, largely absent is the notion of seeing themselves as "change agents." While the populations served by the schools represented in our study continue to struggle to adequately serve the low-income, Latin@ community, the current state of education in the area remains at a crises level. Further analysis of the findings in this study and the potential for change agents to create meaningful change in collaboration with community will be elaborated on in the Discussion section.

Discussion

There is no doubt that educational leaders in urban schools are often faced with monumental tasks. The needs are many and resources provided are few. Consistent with the findings in this study, it is predictable that the immediate needs of students can take precedence over visioning or even long-range planning. In that sense, the leaders interviewed in this study are, in many cases, doing heroic work. At the same time, the focus on the immediate can lead to reductionist views of educational inequality. The researchers attempted to remain cognizant of this, while understanding the limitations of personal agency in the context of systemic, institutional, and societal problems.

One of the limitations of such "heroic" work is to engage in a "savior" mentality. This allows leaders to focus on those students who are seen as being of greatest need who are capable of being helped, whether this means providing a pair of shoes, or a place to study. While admirable in many ways, the savior model can lead to lowered expectations for some, and for those that do go on to college, fosters a myth of "exceptionalism." This means that those who do succeed are doing so due to their exceptional character, innate ability, or work ethic; which then can lead to individualized, deficit explanations for those that end up dropping out or being incarcerated.

The lowered educational expectations were evident in leader's responses that defined success as a "high school diploma", getting a "better job", while explaining that college is not for everyone. This lowered educational expectation is often seen as being reinforced by parental pressure to "get a job to help support the family," even

though research indicates a high level of educational aspiration for Latina/o families overall (Auerbach, 2004).

Although some leaders continued to display confidence that all students could go to college, many appeared influenced by their perception that students' and their families lack educational ambition. This tended to influence leaders toward having lowered student expectations as well. For example, the leader who believed students should move onto a college campus to have the full "college experience" and go against family wishes that he/she might choose a local commuter campus might consider reframing this situation by recognizing the "familial capital" (Yosso, 2005) that can fuel a positive college experience.

From School-to-Prisons Pipeline to College-Going-Culture

In order to move from the school-to-prison pipeline dynamic to a college-going culture, educators and policymakers need to engage students with alternative approaches. Understanding that 95% of all children of immigrants and 91% of all children considered to be of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) attend urban schools, and that disproportionately these populations are low-income, and racially and ethnically segregated (Fix & Capps, 2005), the real and potential relationship with the school-to-prison pipeline becomes clear. The complex dynamics of the school-to-prison pipeline requires a shift in thinking and understanding of the cultural dynamics between communities and schools and how particular groups fail and succeed.

It is from this perspective that educational leaders and policy makers need to understand the "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005) of such groups in order to inform policy and practice. The generally unrecognized educational knowledge and values in the homes of communities of color (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Villenas, 2001) calls for schools to transform policies and practices and increase their involvement with the communities they serve. This transformation may include theoretical expansions that re-examine the K-12 pipeline to higher education that recognizes community-based forms of social and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Other areas of research may provide evidence that K-16 schools must re-examine and recognize the community context in which they serve. In this sense, efforts in school policy, practice and curricular reform that are separated from its community will likely have minimal impact on academic success (Warren, 2005) and only exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline problem. Urban communities are in need of effective school-community collaborations that build upon the diversity and assets that currently exist, but are often overlooked and underutilized.

While the gap between schools and communities remains large, partnerships with the government, colleges, and universities are gaining importance within the K-16 pipeline. In some areas, city officials are making noticeable efforts to improve education for youth as they act as supporters for educational issues and encourage city services such as afterschool programs (Kirst & Edelstein, 2006). Furthermore, schools also collaborate with colleges and universities to help develop college pipelines. K-12 administrators work with college personnel to receive professional development and strategies on how to successfully prepare students for college (Nunez & Olivia, 2009). The State Departments of Education have also provided financial support for state and local activities, projects, and programs that enable access to higher education for students of color (Hawthorne & Zusman, 1992). Lastly, collective programs work with colleges and universities to pave a pathway to college for disadvantaged students (Hawthorne & Zusman, 1992).

While not all of these efforts have adopted the asset-based approach advocated for here, they remain evidence that urban school leaders such as the ones in this study are pivotal figures in transforming a school-to-prison pipeline model, to a school-to-college culture, where community assets become the dominant form of capital.

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