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# Dropout Rate Among Chicano and Latino Immigrant High School Students

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## Author's Note

Emma Smith is an Eastern Washington University Student. This paper was submitted for consideration to the 21st Annual EWU Research and Creative Works Symposium on May, 2018 in Cheney, WA and submitted as an assignment for Introduction to Chicano Culture.

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## Abstract

This paper will discuss the dropout rate among Chicane immigrant high school students in the U.S. This study will exhibit a much higher percentage of Latinx dropouts compared to any other ethnic group in America from 2003 to 2015. There will be specific factors identified as to why this is true, among them, language barriers, the age at which the child first immigrated, and their prior schooling. Additionally, this work explores what can be done to reduce the dropout rates. With the help of scholarly articles, reviews and data analysis, this paper will demonstrate the problems that foreign born Latinx and Chicane students face in the educational system, and propose solutions to increase the graduation rate.

*Keywords:* Chicanos, immigrant, high school, Latinos, dropout

The topic of Chicana immigrant high school students in relation to the dropout rate has been an ongoing discussion for many years. In studies conducted starting in 2000 the percentage of Latinx student dropouts was much more elevated than any other ethnic group in the United States. This paper will address the problem head on while incorporating key contributors as to why this is true. Some of the factors include: language barriers, the age at which the child immigrated, and their schooling before migration. Foreign-born youths (ranging between 15-17 years old) composed 8 percent of all youths in 2000, but they were nearly 25 percent of all high school dropouts. (Fry, 2005). In this paper the question of why this is happening will be researched, and what can be done to increase this number.

To begin there are many reasons as to why an immigrant student chooses to dropout of school, high school specifically. But in this research there are three main issues that keep being brought to attention. The first being, language barriers. It's rational to say that Latinx immigrant students tend to dropout due to this obstacle. Coming to a new country, no one in your family knows the language, then you're basically thrown into a new school. It's extremely difficult. For obvious reasons why the difficulty level is so high, they don't understand or comprehend what's being taught to them, which takes longer for them to catch up on actual school work. The mobility associated with recent immigration and limited English proficiency make it difficult for Latino students to achieve in their classes and leads to many dropouts. (Perreira, 2006). Overall it's double the work and with having to learn new material and a new language all at once it can be too overwhelming for some students. With being a recent arrival there is also a lack of assistance at home due to parents or other family members having no knowledge of the language or customs either. Yes there are programs, like English Language Learners or community classes, that assist these kids who need the help but that isn't guaranteed to work for

every student. The vast majority of dropouts that have never been in U.S schools have very limited spoken English abilities. Most foreign-born Hispanic dropouts educated in the U.S have English fluency by age 16. (Fry, 2006).

Not only is the language barrier a huge factor but the age at which they first immigrated is highly important when considering their education. Those who migrate when they're young (age 10 or younger) have an easier time adjusting to the new culture/surroundings. They also have an easier time learning the language and finishing school all the way through, because English language acquisition is easier for younger children and increases with time spent in the United States. (NCES, 2004b). Those on the other hand who immigrate when they are older have a more strenuous time getting accustomed to the new and very different language, culture and customs. Note that the foreign born students ranging between 15 and 17 who immigrated to the United States but never enrolled in a U.S school are considered dropouts as well because they never "dropped in". Many of the 530,000 Hispanic school dropouts are recently arrived immigrants who have never been enrolled in U.S schools. (Fry, 2003). Recent arrived dropout rates also depend on the country of origin in which the child came from. Countries like Mexico and the Dominican Republic have a higher dropout rate for recently arrived kids than a country like Puerto Rico. Regardless of country of origin, early childhood arrivals are typically much less likely to be school dropouts than their later arriving peers. (Fry, 2003).

At a certain age some of these children realize that school isn't making them money and that they need to work instead, to help support their families. In relation, that's why prior schooling is so important for a child of immigration. Recently arrived foreign-born teens with education difficulties before migration are a small share of foreign-born teens but a large share of foreign-born high school dropouts. The dropout rate for teens with school problems before

migration is in excess of 70 percent vs. 8 percent for other foreign-born youths. (Fry, 2003). This is imperative to know when it comes to the dropout rate or why these kids believe they can't be successful in U.S schools. Their mindset is already dismal due to them having to leave the only home they've ever known. The act of migration in and of itself had negative consequences for academic outcomes. (Warren, 1996). They figure that since they weren't succeeding in their old school there's no way that they would succeed in a brand new school in a completely different country. That's why some of these Latino immigrant kids never enroll in school to begin and come to the U.S as labor migrants instead.

Labor migrants are people who come to the U.S (or a country other than their own) specifically for work. With this the increase in dropout rates was present due to many teenagers feeling the need to work and help their families financially, instead of getting an education, that they felt wasn't going to be of any use for them. Nearly three quarters (74%) of all respondents who cut their education short say they did so because they had to support their family. (Lopez, 2007). And about two thirds (64%) of all Latino/Hispanic immigrants say they send remittances to family members in their country of origin, compared with 21 percent of their U.S born counterparts. (Lopez and Livingston, 2009). Many of these jobs are very laborious, consisting of construction, farming, gardening, housekeeping, etc. They don't really require any form of education so many dropouts, foreign born immigrants and people just looking for work in general tend to lean towards these types of jobs.

There have been many factors as to why Latino and Chicano highschool students dropout, but there have been some solutions implemented in the educational system that has decreased the dropout rate among these students immensely. I chose multiple examples from over the nation that I will be discussing. The first was enacting full-service community high

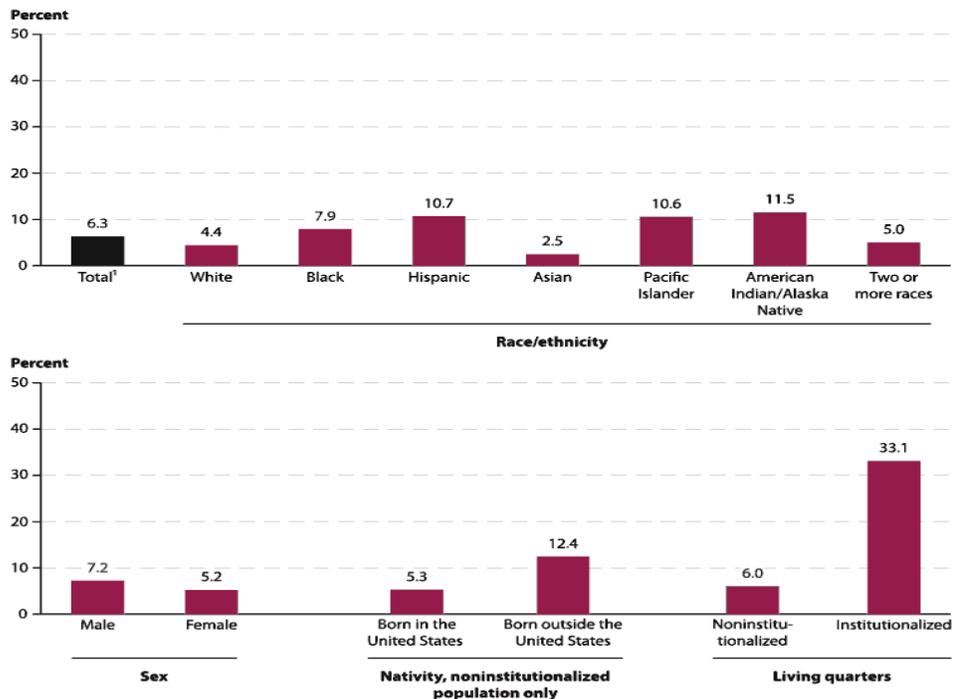
schools with wrap-around services and curriculum tailored to first and second-generation Latino immigrant students. A full service community school focuses on partnerships between a school and its community. It integrates academics, youth development, family support, health and social services and community development. This one was found in Maryland but full service community schools are beginning to pop up all over the nation tailored to students like foreign born Latino/Hispanic immigrant students who could use the extra guidance. Another that can help the whole family is, schools around the country are piloting an education promoter program to connect families to the resources they need to make ends meet. This includes: meaningful education, employment for parents, food, housing, legal assistance, etc. (Casselmann, 2014). This is valuable because it gives the students a chance to solely focus on their education and not have to worry about things they shouldn't have to worry about at their age.

Another solution I found great interest in was, administrators throughout the country are beginning to work with employers to turn the jobs that some kids leave school for, into internships, earning students school credit (instead of money), so they can stay on track to graduate. They also have developed after hours school programs to help students who needed to work during the day, stay in school. (Casselmann, 2014). Not to mention after school language and speech classes for parents and children who can't quite fully comprehend English yet. It gives students a chance to get extra help from their teachers and catch up on homework.

Administrators also schedule summer meetings with parents of students who aren't on track to graduate as well as hiring social worker(s) to work with truant students to help them return to school and offer any extra help that they may need. And lastly, some schools are reconstructing their advisory program so students have one advisor through all four years of high school. This resembles the way most colleges are set up and the success rate in this is very high.

This may seem like a small change to some people, but it makes them comfortable enough to talk to one person in confidence about personal and family issues. Getting to know somebody who isn't a friend, parent or family member can sometimes be extremely therapeutic. Kind of like a mentor. Overall, there are many factors that contribute to the dropout rate of foreign born Latino students. There are solutions that have helped and the good news is they are continuing to come up with more to help students like these kids of immigration. Down below you will find a graph that shows the percentage of Hispanics (including Latinos) in 2014. As you can see the dropout rate has gone down to 10.7 percent which is an incredible improvement. On the second graph they divide it up by Sex, Nativity (whether they were born in or outside of the U.S), and Living Quarters. If you look at the Nativity section and under Hispanics the dropout rate of those born outside of the U.S has dropped to 12.4 percent and dropout rate for the Hispanics born in the U.S is now 5.3 percent.

(U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014)



To conclude this research paper, I would like to review that overall yes, language barriers, the age at which these kids first immigrated and their prior schooling play huge factors as to why many students tend to drop out. Granted there are hundreds of other factors that may result in a Latino immigrant student dropping out. This data goes back to 2000 which was 18 years ago so times (and statistics) have certainly changed, but the ideas and concepts haven't. Hispanics and Latino Americans are the biggest ethnic minority in the U.S and the numbers are going to continue to grow. The best thing we can do is make sure the children get the right education they deserve and help these dropout rates continue to decrease and make sure the graduation rates stay on the rise. Every child deserves a proper education and we should do everything in our power to make sure that happens.

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