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# Success Stories Of Students Of Mexican Descent

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SUCCESS STORIES OF STUDENTS OF MEXICAN DESCENT

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Wesley Montoya

August 2011

Advisor: Kent Seidel, PhD

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### **Abstract**

This study tells the personal stories of three academically successful students of Mexican descent. The goal of this study was to give a counter to the stereotypical deficit view of Hispanic students in the eyes of teachers, parents, and other students.

The participants were three high school students of Mexican descent attending an urban high school in Colorado. The research question of this study allowed the participants to tell their story of what it was like to be a student. The research question was: What are the personal and academic stories of academically successful Mexican urban high school students?

Through in-depth interviews the students shared both their positive and negative experiences. The narratives revealed that each student had similar experiences. The study identified common experiences that became themes and through an analysis of the data, nine findings were identified: (listed alphabetically) adversity, college, discrimination friends/peer pressure, language barriers, parent/family support, pride, responsibility, and teacher support.

By telling the stories of three successful students of Mexican descent, light will be shed on what helped these students become successful. These stories give the reader the opportunity to meet three students of Mexican descent through their stories of what it was like to be a student and to see how they were able to succeed and counter the narrative to the more commonly known deficit views of Hispanic students.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction/Literature Review**

The Hispanic population is on the rise in the United States according to the 2010 US Census report. The 2010 Census report also found Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group, are more likely to be living below the poverty level, and are less likely to finish high school than White Americans are. The public has been informed of the growing concern of a less educated and low socioeconomic Hispanic population by researchers and the media, and with that information, Hispanics are portrayed negatively. The face painted on Hispanics is of a deficit population prone to failure, likely to drop out of school, underachieving, lacking English skills, disadvantaged, illegal immigrants, and a whole range of other problems (Woloszyk, 1996). Educators also read the research and hear the same stories about the likelihood of Hispanic students failing and they can fall into the mode of the self-fulfilling prophecy, believing if researchers have found that Hispanic students are likely to fail then they probably will. Few research studies have been done to counter this deficit view of Hispanic students. Yes, more than 45% of Hispanic students drop out of school, however 55% of Hispanic students do graduate from high school and 12 % of Hispanics earn a B.A. (Aud et al., 2010). Many Hispanics students go on to higher education; many become successful in all areas of the working sector, including government, politics, and entertainment. However, we do not often enough hear their stories of success. There are many reasons why Hispanic students fail and there are many strategies to help students succeed. By telling the stories of three



successful Hispanic students, some light will be shed on what helped these students become successful. These stories provide a counter narrative to the more commonly known deficit viewpoint offered by other researchers and the media.

## **Background**

The 2010 United States Census Report projected that within 20 years, one-fifth of all people in the United States will be Hispanic and the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center, found Hispanics are the fastest growing school age population in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2008). The United States Census Bureau (2010) reports:

- In 2010 the population of the United States was about 310 million people and by 2020 the population is projected to be about 335 million people
- In 2010 the percentage of Hispanic people in the United States was about 15.5% of the total population and by 2020 the Hispanic population is projected to be about 18% of the United States population
- In 2010, the Hispanic population was nearly 48 million and by 2020, the Hispanic population is projected to be at 59.7 million
- School aged Hispanic population is predicted to increase by 2.5 million from 13.5 currently to 16 million by 2015
- 21% of all school-aged students in the United States are Hispanic.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2010), the Hispanic population has increased from 12.5% of the United States population in 2000 to 15.4% of the United States population in 2008. This increase of 3%, or about 11 million people, has made the Hispanic population the largest ethnic group in the United States. The population growth of Hispanics will continue to have an impact on school enrollment. The median age of Hispanics is 27 and 25% of all newborns in the United States are Hispanic (Taylor,

2009). The Pew Hispanic Center (2009) reports that the average Hispanic mother will have three children. The number of Hispanic students in the United States has increased from 6 million in 1980 to almost 16 million in 2010 (Taylor, 2009). The Colorado Department of Education (2010) reports the Hispanic population of school-aged students has increased by 90,000 from 1999 to 2009. Currently, 21% of all school-aged children in the United States are Hispanic and, if projections are correct, by 2015 25% of all school-aged children will be Hispanic.

With an ever-growing population of Hispanic people in the USA, the education of Hispanic students is a concern for educators. Hispanics in public schools in the United States have increased from 5 million in 1990 to nearly 11 million students in 2009, and are currently the largest ethnic group in public schools (Aud et al., 2010). The Colorado Department of Education (2007) reports the Hispanic population of school-aged students increased from 159,000 to over 232,000 students from 2001 to 2006.

As the Hispanic population increases, concerns about the number of dropouts and low-achieving students also continue to increase. There is, and has been, an achievement gap between White students and Hispanic students (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006; Escamilla, Chavez, & Vigil, 2005; Munoz, 2003; Sampson, 2003; Soto, 2007; Zambrana, 1995). Historically, Hispanic achievement rates have been lower than White achievement rates. The Hispanic-White achievement gap over the past 20 years remains unacceptably high (R. Fry, 2005). With the Hispanic population continuing to increase and the achievement gap remaining high between Hispanic and White students, educators are facing challenging times ahead to reduce the number of at-risk of failing students.

According to Aud et al., (2010) ethnic groups including White and Asian have had higher rates of success based on test scores, and they are found to be in the top fifteen percent of their high school class. In addition to test scores Aud et al. (2010) reports graduation rates for White and Asian students are 20-30% higher than Hispanics.

Currently, less than 55 percent of Hispanic students nationwide graduate from high school, 61 percent of Hispanic graduates enroll in college, and only 12 percent of all Hispanics receive a bachelors degree by age 29, compared to 37 percent of Whites (Planty et al., 2009). The Colorado Department of Education (2009) reports less than 54% of Hispanic students graduate from high school. Hispanic students are well below the national norms in reading, writing, and math, have lower Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores than White students, and more Hispanics live in poverty than do Whites (CDE, 2007). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data shows the gap between White and Hispanic students has not significantly changed over the last two decades (Planty et al., 2009). The reasons for this low success vary among researchers, but they all agree the dropout rate and lack of academic success is unacceptably high (Fry, 2003).

Success in the workplace is a direct result of education and some researchers also argue that for many, the success of a person is defined by the amount of success one had in school (Hall & Farkas, 2008; Song, 2005). Additionally, a person's Socioeconomic Status (SES) can be closely correlated to the amount of academic success attained. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2010) reports that earning potential for varies with individuals' level of education. Persons with a high school diploma earn on

average \$23,500 per year compared to \$46,000 for those with a bachelor's degree.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2010), a family of four earning less than \$22,050 a year would fall below the poverty line categorizing them as low SES entitling them to government welfare assistance.

### **At-Risk Factors and Hispanics**

We know why Hispanic students are at-risk of failing (Aud et al., 2010; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Planty, et al., 2009; Woloszyk, 1996). What has not been explored in depth is the other side of the story: the 55% of Hispanic students who do succeed. The research on why Hispanic students are not making the same academic achievement gains as Whites can give the impression that Hispanics have little chance of success. Educators reading such research may come away only with reasons why their Hispanic students are going to fail. Educators risk thinking of their work as overcoming this seeming inevitable failure when, in fact, many Hispanic students are successful academically. Gaining a clear understanding of why Hispanic students do not succeed academically is only the starting place for understanding why they also succeed.

**The definition of the at-risk student.** The factors that contribute to Hispanic students being at risk of failure and what prevents them from being academically successful have been well studied (Barr & Parrett, 2003). According to Woloszyk (1996), there are four categories of at-risk students: being of a United States minority ethnic, performing on standardized tests at a basic or partially proficient level academically, potentially dropping out of school, or having other at-risk labels or indicators such as non or poor attendance, behavior issues, low SES status, and poor academic performance.

Students who are at risk of failing have been given a variety of labels including: disadvantaged, culturally deprived, underachiever, non-achiever, low ability, slow learner, low socioeconomic status, alienated, dropout prone, disenfranchised, underprivileged, low performing, language impaired, remedial, behavior problem, truant, and minority group (Woloszyk, 1996). Students at risk of failing are in jeopardy of not completing high school, particularly if they fall under one or more of the at-risk labels. When students are frequently absent, they do not receive the instruction needed to complete work and are less likely to do well in their classes as a result. Students with behavior problems also spend less time in class due to being suspended and have a greater risk of failure due to not having the instruction needed to do well in class or on assignments.

**Language barriers.** Language barriers of many Hispanics present challenging issues for educators, parents, and students. Students who do not gain the English language skills needed to become successful may have a difficult time succeeding academically. Parents who are Spanish speakers and do not have English language skills are less likely to be able to help their children and be involved in their children's education. If a parent is working more than one job and/or was a high school dropout, s/he may not have the ability to read well and therefore does little or no reading at home. Parents with low education are less likely to read to their children compared to parents with higher education (Galindo & Fuller, 2010). Being able to read to children is difficult for many Hispanic parents who often do not speak English. Parents of students who primarily speak Spanish in the home lack skills to be able to read to their children,

which in turn leaves young children underprepared for school (Tienda, 2009). Schools have established programs that are designed to teach English to non-English speaking students.

**Retention.** Hispanic students are also more likely to be retained than their White peers (Aud et al., 2010). Retention is the repeating of a grade level from grades one through eight. Educators, parents, and others have debated as to whether or not retention of students is beneficial to student achievement. Schools give teachers the task of determining whether a student has mastered the curriculum and teachers base their decisions on test scores, observations, and personal judgment. Retention, used primarily for students who have not mastered the acceptable standard of the taught curriculum during a given year, is an intervention schools have used for decades to give students a second chance to demonstrate proficiency. Despite the evidence of retention having a negative effect, schools continue to retain students (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004). Research has shown an increased risk of dropping out of school if a student is retained compared to students who were never retained (Randolph, Rose, Fraser, & Orthner, 2004). The rate of retention for Hispanic students may be due, in part, to the teacher's perceived ability of students due to two factors, low SES and minority status (Bol & Berry, 2005).

With schools using a high degree of emphasis on teacher recommendation for retention, students who are at-risk of failing have a greater probability of being retained than students who are not at-risk of failing (Solberg, Caristrom, Howard, & Jones, 2007). Many teachers believe that retention is best for the student because he or she is not

proficient in the current grade and therefore is not prepared for the next grade (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009). The negative effects of retention include social problems, poor academic achievement and dropping out of school (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Schools use retention as an intervention to help students prepare for the next grade; however, there are more effective practices that help students achieve academic success.

**Absent fathers.** The absence of male figures in a student's home life or being in a single parent setting is another at-risk of failing factor for Hispanic students (Weitoft, Hjern, & Rosen, 2004). A single-parent household is negatively associated with children's achievement gains in reading and mathematics (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Traditional roles for Hispanic parents are typically that the mother takes responsibility for overseeing the education of the children and the father is the bread winner (Formoso, Gonzales, Barrera Jr, & Dumka, 2007). When parenting includes more support from fathers, and fathers take a more active role in the education of their children, academic achievement increases along with the decrease of detrimental conduct behaviors (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006; Formoso et al., 2007; Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009; Stein et al., 2009). Students who have poor relationships with their fathers tend to have risky behaviors, which can include staying away from home and living on the streets (Stein et al., 2009). Many Hispanic parents are less likely to be engaged in their children's education due to having a limited education, not being able to speak English, and not being home due to long hours at work or working multiple jobs.

Due to the situation many Hispanic parents are in, they are not able to help their children academically and students fall behind their White peers in school.

**School issues.** Hispanic students attend schools where the majority of students are low-SES and high-minority status (Aud et al., 2010). Fry (2005) reports Hispanic students have higher rates of poverty than White students do, are less likely to attend schools with students in higher SES areas, and will attend schools with less experienced teachers. Consequently, these students are likely to have teachers that, while qualified to teach in other areas, are not licensed to teach in their current area of practice, due to the school's inability to recruit licensed teachers for certain subject areas (Aud et al., 2010). The lack of highly qualified teachers in schools where Hispanic students attend can contribute to low academic performance and impede the ability of students to succeed in high-level courses that prepare students for college. As a result of Hispanic students being less prepared for college they are also less likely to do well academically when they attend college.

### **Support for Hispanic Students**

Hispanic students do have a number of reasons that impede their ability to succeed, however, there are supports in place for Hispanics to perform as well as their White peers do. Accountability for schools, educational strategies, interventions, effective teachers, and parental involvement, shows increased academic achievement with Hispanic students (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003).



**Accountability.** *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Goals 2000, and The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),* are lawmakers' ways of providing school accountability for Americans (Finn, 2008; Ravitch, 2001). *The No Child Left Behind Act* states,

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (Section 1001) (Congress, 2001a).

Schools are responsible for providing a quality education to ensure Hispanics are as successful as White students are. Yet with all of the accountability measures in place, not all students are performing at the same levels of achievement. Hispanic students have not performed at the same rate of achievement as their White peers for the past thirty years (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006; Escamilla et al., 2005; Munoz, 2003; Sampson, 2003; Soto, 2007; Zambrana, 1995). Hispanic students are performing poorly on standardized tests and in their class grades as compared to their White peers. Fry (2005) found that Hispanic students are not offered rigorous courses, do not have teachers who are experienced, and have low expectations from parents and educators. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2009) reports Hispanic students score on average 26% lower on achievement tests compared to White students. Planty et al. (2009) reported that the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students had not narrowed on NAEP during the past decade.

Along with the lower achievement scores, graduation rates are also much lower for Hispanic students (Planty et al., 2009). As the Hispanic population grows, the number of Hispanic dropouts has also increased.

Congress enacted *The No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), in order to assure schools were accountable to the public and to students. With NCLB, many lawmakers believe students have a better chance at being successful in school and in achieving their goals. Because of the mandates of NCLB, strategies that are effective in closing the achievement gap are especially important to educators.

**Teaching strategies.** Sunderman's (2005) study reports teachers and administrators are looking for ways to improve student success. Effective teaching practices and methods have given all students the opportunity to become successful academically. Studies about effective educational strategies such as aligned standards, curriculum and assessments aligned to standards, effective teaching strategies, and accountability by Marzano (2001), McTighe (2005), and Dufour (1998) have given schools the theory to increase academic success of students. Researchers, Marzano (2001), Stiggins (2005), and English and Steffy (2001), describe what a student should know and be able to do based on proficiency on a given set of standards. Research-based educational strategies have improved test scores and graduation rates of students in many schools around the nation (Marzano, 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Soto, 2007).

Marzano (2001), Stiggins (2005), Lindsey (2005), and others have studied strategies and interventions that need to be in place to improve student achievement. By understanding what compels Hispanic students to achieve at proficient levels, educators can develop effective programs to help Hispanic students achieve academic success (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). Many teachers have focused on using effective teaching strategies that improve achievement of at-risk of

failing Hispanic students. However, longitudinal data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1971 through 2007 shows that despite all of the improvement in teaching there continues to be a gap in the achievement of “students of color” verses their white peers (Planty et al., 2009).

**English language learners.** Many Hispanic students new to the United States are not proficient in English. Students who are not proficient in English are placed in English Language Development programs in schools. Students placed in ELD programs are English Language Learners (ELL’s). Waxman’s (2002) report on English Language Learner’s, identified factors that need to be addressed in order to reduce academic failure and increase achievement:

- Placement of highly qualified teachers in classrooms- teachers in classrooms do not have the proper credentials or training to teach ELL’s (p. 3)
- Inappropriate teachers’ expectations of ELL’s- teachers believe ELL students are not able to learn due to language limitations, ELL’s do not learn higher order thinking skills until they learn basic knowledge and teachers rely on drill and practice due to the belief students are in need of remediation (p. 4)
- Over reliance of direct instruction of students constituting a pedagogy of poverty; teachers rely on whole class instruction and control discussion and all decision making, teachers rely on lecture, drill, practice, seat-work, and worksheets which all constitutes a lack of interaction and group work which helps motivate students (p. 5)
- Little or no interaction between teachers and students- “teachers spend more time explaining things to students than questioning, cueing, or prompting students to respond extensively or to help each other” (p. 5)

In addition to problems teaching ELL’s, Waxman (2002) identified effective strategies when teaching ELL students:

- **Collaborative Learning Communities**  
Teachers group students and focus on teaching social relationships as opposed to identified roles. All students have equal roles and are able to discuss topics, formulate questions, develop ideas, and reflect on the outcomes of the discussion (Scott, 2006)
- **Providing Multiple Representations**  
Showing pictures of terms used such as linking the term bird with a picture or video
- **Building on Prior Knowledge**  
Enriching the curriculum by using a student's prior knowledge as a way to bring a new perspective to the curriculum the students are learning
- **Instructional Conversation**  
Provides for extended dialog to allow students to build on vocabularies needed for instruction and academic language
- **Culturally Responsive Instruction**  
The alignment of instruction to the home culture of the student to enhance social, academic, and cultural enrichment of all students
- **Cognitively Guided Instruction**  
Teaching students to learn how to learn

**Effective teachers.** Teacher quality is also listed as a requirement of NCLB. In order for students to be proficient, they need highly qualified teachers in the classroom. Hispanic students can be motivated to do well academically in school with teachers' support (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Wentzel, 1997) . Marzano (2001), McTighe (2005), and Stronge (2002) found that teachers possessing certain attributes and abilities such as enthusiasm, motivation, relationship building, and organization are fundamental to student success in school. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are considered the three "Rs" in education and according to Witmer (2005), relationship is the fourth "R." Motivation of student's success and achievement can be improved with positive teacher-student relationships (Cemalcilar, 2010). Students who have good relationships with their

teachers tend to perform higher academically. One reason may be students view the teacher as an extended family member who encourages and supports them academically (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers come to the profession for many reasons and are entrusted with the lives of young people. They want to inspire others to learn, plant seeds that cause students to grow in knowledge and curiosity, and give all that a student is willing to take in the form of knowledge. Like the priesthood, teaching, is a calling, a calling to impart knowledge to open minds. In his poem, "What is a Teacher?" Gerald Grow (1997) wrote:

To a mind of flint, the teacher must be iron, and strike sparks.

To the empty pitcher, the teacher becomes a well.

To the fallow mind, a planter of seeds.

To the cluttered mind, a gardener to weed, shape, and clear a space for growing.

To the lens, the teacher is light, and to the mind of light, a lens.

To the sleeper, the teacher is the wake-up call of birds at sunrise.

To clay, the teacher is potter, sculptor, and trainer in self-shaping.

To the wanderer, the teacher is a knowing guide.

To the developed mind, the teacher is colleague, listener, friend.

To all, the teacher is a mirror that shows not only the self but the path and its choices, the task and its demands--the difficulties, the joys.

To all and from all, the teacher is a learner, a person--and a prism through which the ordinary continuously reveals itself to be miraculous.

(<http://www.longleaf.net/ggrows>)

**Parental support.** In addition to teacher support Hispanic students are also motivated by parent support (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). *Familia* defined as having strong emotional ties and respect for doing what the family wants, and plays an important part in Hispanic success (Shorris, 1992; Soto, 2007; Valdés, 1996; Valencia,

2002). Achievement, motivation, and learning all increase when parents are actively engaged in their children's education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Hispanic students were more likely to be intrinsically motivated with an authoritative parent and all students were more successful when parents had an authoritative parenting style and were positive and encouraging. (Rumberger, et al., 1990). Making children turn off the television, and requiring time for homework shows children that their parents are concerned about education. Bronte-Tinkew et al., (2006) also report that students have fewer risky behaviors where paternal involvement was positive beyond the effects of maternal involvement. High levels of paternal involvement decreased delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, and increased academic success compared to low levels of paternal involvement, which increased risk behaviors and decreased academic success among adolescents (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Stein et al., 2009). Authoritative parenting is associated with positive educational, social, emotional, and cognitive developmental outcomes in children (Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005). Positive paternal relationships are authoritative rather than authoritarian. Authoritarian parenting uses strong control and little emotional support, whereas authoritative parents are emotionally supportive, set limits, and use non-coercive disciplinary strategies.

Having strategies in place for students helps Hispanics have a greater chance of success. Hispanic students have the ability to graduate from high school, college, and they can succeed and perform as well as their White peers. There are many examples of success among the Hispanic population. Hispanics can be teachers, business leaders, politicians, astronauts, and Supreme Court justices or anything they want to be. Ken

Salazar is the Interior Secretary of the US and a former US Senator, Bill Richardson was governor of New Mexico, Ellen Ochoa was an astronaut with NASA, and Sonia Sotomayor is a Supreme Court justice of the United States. Ethnicity does not prevent success, but self-doubt, lack of support, and access to education can be impediments for many people. There are thousands of Hispanic successes. Success stories can put a positive face on the successful person and the person can become a role model for other people. Children hear stories of heroes, real and mythical, and want to emulate them. There are not enough Hispanic role model success stories told for children to try to be like. Most success stories told are about the person's current situation and status. What are missing from much of the literature are the stories of how the individual came to be successful and the stories of the struggles individuals went through to become a success. Many students are struggling for many reasons as stated in the literature above. They need to know that even though they are struggling there is hope for them and by reading about or being told stories of struggles that led to success they can have the role models and the heroes that they are currently lacking.

### **Successful Hispanics**

Although many Hispanic students do not graduate, there are those who are successful. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) explore external factors that must be considered to help influence the success of Hispanics. The researchers concluded the need to examine what successful students report as helping them to be successful, in order to shed light on the strategic interventions.

A report from The Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice

(2009) found these important elements for student success:

- Provide extended learning opportunities during the summer (travel, museum trips, academic camps, summer school, and so forth),
- Substitute TV, games, and non academic internet activities with an effective after-school program such as tutoring,
- Enroll students in preschool to make a positive difference not only in children's academic achievements, but also in their social skills and in their progress through school (Berliner, 2009)

Longer periods of involvement in education, collaborative learning opportunities, and building on prior and worldly knowledge, give students the opportunity to learn by doing.

Miranda, et al., (2007) found these "Student Success Skills" vital to overall academic success:

- Creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom.
- Goal setting, progress monitoring, and success story sharing.
- Cognitive and memory skills.
- Performing under pressure: managing test anxiety.
- Mental practice is introduced as one way to improve performance.
- Building healthy optimism.

Students become more successful when these concepts, tools, and strategies, are introduced and practiced in the classroom (Miranda et al., 2007).

A report from the Hispanic Outlook on Higher Education (2004) on *Nurturing Hispanic Success* found basic strategies teachers should do to foster Hispanic student success. The report states, "Professors must create an inclusive and welcoming classroom



atmosphere, build rapport with their students and foster student-student bonds”

(McGlynn, 2004; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007). The study focused on particular strategies that teachers of Hispanic students can do to ensure students are successful. Saavedra and Saavedra (2007) write,

It is particularly important to know each student’s name and to be able to express how much we care about them as human beings. Eye contact, smiles, and other positive nonverbals are essential in creating a safe communication climate for these students. Verbally we affirm their participation, and we get to know their stories, their opinions, and their challenges. (p. 77)

Contreras, a researcher from University of Washington, stated in an interview with *Colorín Colorado* (2010) that there are several things Hispanic students need in order to be successful. She says the most important thing is to believe that Hispanic students can achieve. Making positive comments on papers, taking the time to critique work, not dismissing students ability by assuming students don't want to or cannot go to college or graduate, and relate to parents on a more personal level, as partners (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Setting goals and having students sharing them with parents in student led conferences allows parents to learn what their children’s aspirations are and teachers are able to engage with and encourage students about their future. Contreras says that planning and sharing goals “sends the message that the student can achieve that goal, that going to college is absolutely an expectation they should have, and that the decisions the student makes will affect whether the goal is met” (from: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/fromtheheart/28378>).

A report from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2007) on Hispanic student success includes these factors as vital elements of student success:

- Make an explicit commitment to serving Hispanic students an integral and visible element of the institution's mission, strategic plans, and public messages
- Listen carefully to Hispanic students to determine their distinctive needs and experiences
- Recognize the importance of family and community connections to Hispanic students by directing the establishment of programs that maintain those connections
- Work to replicate the networks of support that are typical of Hispanic families and communities by directing academic-affairs and student-affairs staff to design programs that promote multiple connections among Hispanic students
- Create the conditions to sustain a culture of success for Hispanic students, through faculty and staff recruitment, staff development, and targeted investment
- Evaluate programs and progress continuously to determine what is working and where modifications might be required

This study focused on what campus leaders could do to foster high levels of institutional performance in retaining and graduating Hispanic students. As Contreras, researcher from University of Washington, notes,

How are we going to take tangible steps to turn the current story around? The education system is the primary vehicle for mobility and economic stability for families and communities. I am hopeful that my research efforts will help to shape the educational policy arena in a way that positively affects Latino students ... (from: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/fromtheheart/28378>)

Knowing what educators can do to improve Hispanic student success and prevent students from failing is valuable but it is equally powerful to understand why Hispanic students succeed. Hispanic student success is possible. Many Hispanic people have demonstrated that success is something that is attainable. With determination, motivation,

and support Hispanic students can achieve success. George Matthew Adams is quoted as saying:

There is no such thing as a 'self-made' man[/woman]. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success (from <http://www.1-famous-quotes.com/quote/169379>).

Success is possible when we allow others, whether they are parents, teachers, institutions, or our friends to help us see that we can succeed.

### **Conclusion**

There is an ever-growing population of Hispanic students in this country according to the 2010 US Census report. Hispanics have been portrayed negatively, a population prone to failure, likely to drop out of school, underachieving, lacking English skills, disadvantaged, illegal immigrants, and a whole range of other problems (Woloszyk, 1996). The research puts a deficit view on Hispanic students. Educators and others read the research about Hispanic failure rates and how difficult it is for them to graduate. About 45% of Hispanics do not graduate from high school and there is a need to close the education gap between Hispanic's and their White peers (Aud et al. 2010). Nearly 55% of Hispanics graduate from high school, but much of the research has been on helping the students who are most at risk. Accountability, educational strategies, interventions, effective teachers, and parental involvement, shows increased academic achievement with Hispanic students (Lindsey et al., 2005; Marzano, 2003; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). Although many Hispanic students do not graduate implementing

effective practices have been shown to help students succeed. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) report there is a need to examine what successful students report as helping them to be successful, in order to shed light on the strategic interventions. Researchers McGlynn (2004), Saavedra and Saavedra (2007), Miranda (2007) and others found that having strategies such as a welcoming classroom, understanding the importance of family, building relationships with students were all helpful to Hispanic student success. What seems to be missing from the literature are the students themselves sharing the strategies they found were helpful to their academic success. This study will report the strategies and practices Hispanic students feel helped them to become successful.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used in this study.

**Achievement gap.** The disparity of academic achievement between ethnic groups

**At-risk student:** Disadvantaged, culturally deprived, underachiever, non achiever, low ability, slow learner, low socioeconomic status, alienated, dropout prone, underprivileged, low-performing, language impaired, impoverished, or remedial student (Woloszyk, 1996)

**Challenges.** At risk indicators: students who did not speak English when entering school, low socioeconomic status, limited or no parental or teacher support, students who have non-English-speaking parents (Gandara, 2005)

**Dropout rate.** The percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an

equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate) (p. 68) (Aud et al., 2010)

**Failure.** A lack of success, a failing to perform or accomplish the next educational level.

**Hispanic.** Term used to identify people on the U.S. Census category for ethnicity. In this study Hispanic is used interchangeably with Mexican and Latino/a.

**Latino/a.** A person of Latin American or Caribbean descent and living in the United States who are Spanish speakers

**Mexican.** Persons who have ancestral origins in Mexico

**Obstacles.** Living in poverty, coming from a single parent family, lack of support from parents and teachers, language, being an ethnic minority

**Poverty Line.** A minimum income level below which a person is officially considered to lack adequate subsistence and to be living in poverty

**Resiliency.** The ability to recover readily from adversity (Bernard, 1993)

**Retention.** Also called grade retention, being held back or repeating an academic year of school

**Socioeconomic Status.** A measure of an individual's economic and social position compared to others, low, middle, and high are the three categories (Wikipedia, 2010)

**Successful Student:** Students who achieve academic success by being at the top fifteen percent of their class, performing proficient on standardized tests, graduating from high school, and obtaining financial prosperity

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **Important Contribution of This Study**

The intent of this qualitative study was to provide the reader with a counter to the deficit image of Hispanic students. Statistics can give the impression that Hispanic students have little chance of success. Educators read the research and believe that Hispanic students are prone to failure before giving them a chance to succeed. A self-fulfilling prophecy begins within the education system when educators believe that Hispanic students will have a low success rate. Hispanic students often face challenges which hold back their ability to succeed (Fry, 2005) however there are students who overcame the statistics and have become successful.

This qualitative research tells the stories of three students of Mexican descent. The stories the students tell answer the research question:

What are the personal and academic stories of academically successful Hispanic urban high school students?

The stories will provide the reader the opportunity to better understand what it is like to be a student by reading about the experiences of three students of Mexican descent. The research was conducted over a two-month period with three participants. Each student participated in three in-depth interviews to tell the researcher their story of what it was like to be a student. The interviews began with the question: Tell me what it is like to be a student. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions

were then organized into stories into a sequential timeline in order to have a beginning and an ending of the story. Educators have read the research about Hispanic students and their high rate of failure. They have read the research on why Hispanic students do not succeed and many teachers approach students with deficit views because that is what the research has told them and Hispanic students continue to fall behind. The stories that are told in this study provide a counter narrative to teachers' deficit view of Hispanic students and tell their stories of success.

This study tells the stories of three students of Mexican origin. Stories are an important part of culture, and particularly of Mexican and many other Hispanic cultures. Stories both entertain and inform people. Dictionary.com (2011) defines a story as a “narrative, either true or fictitious, in prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the hearer or reader; a tale.” Stories generally have a beginning and an ending. Stories have been used for thousands of years to instruct people. Many people use stories to pass on their history, culture and beliefs to the younger generations and to other people. Many Hispanic people share their values and culture through an oral tradition. Grandparents tell their grandchildren how to behave by telling stories about children who did not follow the expectations of their parents. The story of *La Llorona* is meant to keep children from wondering to far away from home. A story about the struggles of ancestors and other people is meant to give instruction in perseverance. Stories can be written or they can be told orally. The lives of people are a compilation of stories. The individual events in a person's life can have struggles, successes, joy, pain and a myriad of other events and emotions. Stories are remembered and many people make

connections with the characters in the story because they have had similar experiences. Many people believe the stories they are told, especially if they are told by a credible source. Hispanics have been in the news recently and many are portrayed negatively. The media reports on stories saying there are many Hispanic people here in the U.S. illegally and are taking jobs and filling our schools with students that do not understand English. The media rarely if ever reports on the Hispanic students that graduate and go on to college and become citizens that contribute to the communities in which they live. Without stories about successful Hispanics, the current disparaging viewpoint of Hispanic people offered through media will persist. This study tells the stories of successful Hispanic students to counter the stories of failing students.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of three successful Hispanic students. The research question is:

What are the personal and academic stories of academically successful Hispanic urban high school students?

This study used qualitative interviewing to “find out what others feel and think about their world” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 2). This study includes interviews of Hispanic students to hear the stories of what it was like to be a student that countered expected trends of not being successful in school. A modification of the gateway approach as described by Mears (2009) will be used to guide the interviews. The gateway approach “provides a means of connection, a way toward deeper understanding of the



experience” (Mears, 2009, p. 9). The term gateway is a way of entering into a specific place or experience. The interviews will provide the data that will be analyzed and shared with others (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

## **Background**

Researchers have written about the many reasons that prevent Hispanic students from being successful academically (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Fry, 2010; Woloszyk, 1996). To a large extent the research educators read, inform them nearly half of all Hispanics will drop out before graduating high school. This study allows the readers to see a counter to the deficit view that other research places in front of them. This study hopes to show that there are Hispanic students who become successful despite the odds against them.

## **Study Design**

This study is a phenomenological, qualitative design that utilized student interviews to answer the research question. “Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). The researcher interviewed students to capture their stories about what it was like to be a student. Essentially our experiences are told to others in the form of stories. People’s experiences are a compilation of stories and people are not threatened or intimidated by the telling of stories (Patton, 2002). Seidman (1991) discusses the importance of stories in a person’s life as a way of knowing and understanding. “Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. Story telling is the process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them

order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (p. 1).

The focus of this study was how students of Mexican descent describe their experiences of being a student and how they achieved academic success. Reading the stories of the students provides a greater understanding of what it is like to be a Hispanic student and become academically successful. The interview process allows the researcher to hear what students view as important experiences and events that shaped their success. This study used in-depth interviews to hear the voices of individual students who had experienced the phenomena of success. Three students from an urban high school in Colorado were interviewed for this study.

#### **Site Selection:**

One school district in Colorado was used for this study. District A was chosen for this study because it was in close proximity to the researcher and had a significant population of students of Mexican descent.

The student body of the school district selected was diverse with male and female students from all socio-economic levels, various racial backgrounds, and had students from grades nine through twelve.

#### **Sample Selection**

In accordance with School District A’s Board of Education Policies for conducting research, the Assessment and Research Department and the school principal were contacted with a letter (Appendix E) explaining the study and requesting that the researcher be permitted to conduct the study at the school. The District Request to

Conduct Research Form (Appendix F) was completed and district and school approval was granted. Counselors from the school were asked to identify three Mexican students to participate in this study. Students of Mexican descent were selected because of the likelihood of having Spanish as their main language, which was one of the three criteria for the study. Each student participating in this study had experienced the phenomenon of academic success as indicated by being ranked in the top fifteen percent of their class as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA), or because he or she had made significant academic gains over the past three years. Gains for students were defined as:

- Increasing their GPA to 3.0 and/or performing proficient or advanced on the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP)

Students also met the following criteria:

- Students with two or more at-risk of failing labels,
- Students or their parents had recent ancestral roots in Mexico.

Using the criteria for the phenomenon of academic success school counselors were asked to identify students for the researcher to interview for the study. The counselors used the student administration database and first filtered students by ethnicity. They then filtered students by GPA and CSAP proficiency. The next filter was previous or current student in English Language Development (ELD) classes. This resulted in a list of 35 students. The counselors presented the researcher with the names of the students. The researcher began randomly contacting the students and informed them about the study. The researcher asked the students about his or her background and if they or their parents were from Mexico. Once the researcher identified five students that met the criteria for the study three students were randomly chosen. The researcher

contacted the three students to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study. Each student was given an overview of what they would be asked to do in order to participate in the study. The researcher stated that they would need to participate in three in-depth interviews lasting about 60 to 90 minutes spread out over a two to three week period. The researcher stated he would ask them to tell him what it is like to be a student. The students would be recorded and their stories would be written in the study. They were told that participation in any interview was strictly voluntary and that their identity would not be revealed. The researcher asked the students if they were interested in participating in the study. The first three students indicated they would be interested and the researcher stated the next step would be to contact their parents and inform them of the study. The researcher then called to set up a meeting with the parents and students who agreed to participate to explain the study and answer any questions they had. The researcher explained the study, what the students would be asked to do and the required amount of time the students would need participate. Parents were told that the student's identity would not be revealed and that participation was voluntary. The students and parents were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time and there would be no penalty or recourse against the student or parent. Questions about the study were answered and when all concerns had been addressed the students and their parents were asked to sign an informed consent letter (Appendix A). The consent letters were available in both Spanish and English for the parents and participants read and signed the English consent form. The actual names of the students remained anonymous and their names were not used in the stories.

## **Instrumentation**

Interview Guides (Appendix B) adapted from Mears (2009) were used to facilitate the interviews. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the study: Learning about his or her story of what it was like to be a Mexican/Hispanic student who was academically successful. Using Creswell's (1998) guidelines for a phenomenological approach, Hispanic students who had experienced the phenomenon of success were asked questions that explored the meaning of their lived experiences. Open-ended questions helped structure the discussion in a way that led to answering the research question: What are the personal and academic stories of academically successful Mexican/Hispanic urban high school students? This required the participants to answer questions about their experiences of being a student through long interviews (Creswell, 1998).

## **Data Gathering Procedures**

The interviews were conducted in an office within the school and were recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed for the reporting of accurate information. The first interview began with the student being reminded of the researchers interest in their story about what it is like to be a student. Students were told that their participation was voluntary and that if at any time they wanted to end the interview that request would be honored and there would be no action taken against the student. Students were reminded that the interview would be recorded and their story would be transcribed. Students were asked if they had any questions. After all questions were answered the interview began by asking, "Tell me about school. What it is like to be a student?" Follow-up questions were used to clarify or extend the story as the student was sharing

his or her experience. Open-ended questions provided the process to encourage the participants to tell his or her story (Appendix B). Examples of follow up questions that were used were: You stated that your teacher helped you. How did she help? You mentioned that your parents supported you. What did they do to support you?

After the student stated that they had told all they could at the time of the interview the recording was concluded and the next steps were explained. The first interview for each student was approximately 60-90 minutes in length.

The recordings were then transcribed and returned to the student for a check for accuracy. After the student had their transcript for three to five days, a second interview was set up to clarify add or delete parts of the story. The questions for the second interview were derived from gaps in the initial interview. A third interview was held to clarify any additional information from the second interview and to ask if there was anything addition the student wanted to add to their story.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The narratives were not told in chronological order. For example, students might talk about teachers, parents, friends, and goals in one paragraph. Some paragraphs needed to be read before the previous paragraph could be understood. Going through this process allowed patterns to be identified, and these became themes if viewed repeatedly. Statements about teachers were placed in the section titled *Teachers*; statements about parents were placed into the section titled *Parents*, etc. Each section was then ordered sequentially and edited in the form of a story beginning with the student from before attending school as a young child

to future goals beyond high school in order to have a beginning and ending to their stories.

The stories told provided the opportunity to hear from these three Hispanic students what it is like to be a student. A Data Analysis Organizer adapted from Mears (2009) (Appendix D) was used for recording themes or patterns. After repeatedly reading each story, common experiences, key words, and phrases that were used by the students, were highlighted and coded into categories using a modified gateway approach (Mears, 2009). The common phenomena were identified as themes if two or more of the students had similar experiences. (Appendix D). The common phenomena that became the themes, listed alphabetically, were: adversity, college, discrimination friends/peer pressure, language barriers, parent/family support, pride, responsibility, and teacher support.

All of the statements are in the students' own words. The edited narratives were then returned to each individual student to check their story for accuracy. Mears (2009) refers to this process as a narrator check. The narratives the students edited for accuracy and the addition information acquired during the second and third interviews were added to the edited narratives. The edited narratives are presented in their entirety in Chapter 4.

### **Timeframe for Study**

This study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year. During the second semester of the school year, the researcher selected three students of Mexican descent to participate in this study. Each student participated in three 60-90 minute in-depth interviews. Data was analyzed and compiled by May 2011.

## **Confidentiality and Other Ethical Concerns**

Participation in this project was strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project to participants were minimal. Students were allowed to refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time during the study. Transcripts were identified by pseudonyms only and were kept separate from information that could identify participants to protect the confidentiality of the students. Only the researcher and committee members had access to the data. Data, audiotapes, transcripts, notes and all other documents were secured in the researcher's locked file drawer as required by the IRB. No audiotapes, transcription notes, field notes, or the researcher's journal were used for purposes other than this study.

## **My Story**

As an educator, I have been interested in why some Hispanic students succeed and why others do not. I taught Hispanic students and I supervised teachers who teach Hispanic students. As a Hispanic male who had to overcome obstacles, I know what I did to attain my level of success. This desire to understand how to help others to become academically successful is the driving force behind the research questions in this study. I want to know and share the stories of how other Hispanic students achieve success. My own story shows I countered expected lack of success. I believe success occurs more often when others see there is possibility of success rather than a possibility of failure.

I was in elementary school during the early 1960s. Both of my parents were fluent Spanish speakers. They were born and raised in Colorado and so were their parents. Neither of my parents graduated from high school and, in fact, my father only completed



the sixth grade. We were not desperately poor but we were not well-off financially. My father worked as a rancher and then as a custodian at a local school. My mother stayed home and took care of the family and the home. I have two sisters, both graduated from high school and one brother who graduated from college with a Master's degree.

My first memory of being a student who was not successful was in the fourth grade. I was in class and we were reading a story. The teacher had everyone taking turns reading aloud. When it was my turn, I did not want to read because I was not a good reader. The teacher encouraged me to read so I began. I stuttered through a paragraph, other students laughed and I stopped reading. The teacher told me to continue but I refused. What she said next was a turning point in my life. What she probably said was "go sit in the corner if you are not going to read." What I believed she said was "go sit in the corner until you learn how to read." Because of this incident in class, I decided that I would not be humiliated like that again. I became the clown and the problem kid. I was passed on through each grade all the time lacking reading skills. I was able to read words but had little, if any, ability to comprehend what I read. I had several teachers who told me that I would not go to college. Instead, I should think about a career I could do that used my hands rather than my head. When I turned 17, I was with a group of friends who were talking about what they were going to do when they graduated from high school. Everyone in the group had been accepted into college and all were destined to be successful at each school they were going to attend. They asked me where I was going but, in order to not feel humiliated by telling them the truth, I told them I was still

deciding on where is was going. The truth was I was going to try to find a job and hope for the best.

I had an uncle visit that same day and asked the same question, “You are going to graduate this year so what are your plans?” I told him the same story I told my friends but he would not accept my answer. My uncle said, “You have to know, you are 17. What do you like to do? Why wouldn’t you know by now?” After what seemed like an interrogation that was never going to end, I finally told him “I don’t know what I am going to do because I cannot read.” He was shocked to hear that. “How can you not read, you are a senior in high school?” After telling him my story, he stated, “I will teach you to read.” He came over to my house for the next several months and taught me how to comprehend what I was reading. I continued to go to school and struggle through my classes and graduated in the bottom third of my class.

After graduating from high school, I went to college. My first year was a disaster. I did not have enough money to live on campus so I lived at home the first quarter. Because I did not have enough money to drive to school every day, I hitchhiked to and from school about thirty miles each way. I earned three credits for my first quarter in school. Second quarter was not much better. I had enough money to live in the dormitory on campus but I only had enough money to eat nine meals during the week and no meals on the weekend. Third quarter I lived at home. My father bought me a car so I could drive to school. He paid \$25 for the car and fixed the engine so it would be somewhat reliable. The money I would have paid for the dormitory was used to pay for travel to and from school. I earned a 1.8 GPA at the end of my first year of college. I was determined to

prove to myself and to those who said I would not go to college to graduate college and be successful. It took six years to complete my BA, but I graduated from college.

I became a teacher with the desire to help students succeed who were struggling in school. After teaching for several years, I returned to college, earned my Masters degree, and became a school administrator. I felt that I could help more students as someone overseeing a school as opposed to a classroom. I have worked as an administrator in several schools and I am a successful Hispanic who overcame the doubts of many, including many of my teachers. I am a success. Many other Hispanic people have become successful and if they can be successful, there is hope for all Hispanics who want to become successful.

### **Limitations**

This study only had three participants from one school in Colorado. The participants were ethnic students from families who are Hispanic but do not represent all Hispanic students. Due to the study design, the findings cannot be generalized to other students or districts.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a counter narrative to the deficit view of Hispanic students. The stories these students told allows the reader to hear what Hispanic students say what it was like to be a student. The stories tell how their experiences took them from a young child to high school and the point they were in their academic career. The stories will let readers know that even though the literature gives Hispanic students a 45% chance of failing many do succeed and prosper. These stories were compiled from the perceptions

of Hispanic students and their experiences as told in their interviews. This study also contributes to the limited body of research and literature regarding Hispanic academic success. Much is known about why Hispanic students are at-risk of failing. As a result of this study Hispanic students will be seen with the perspective of being able to succeed. Chapter 3 presents a critical analysis, Chapter 4 presents the students' stories, and Chapter 5 presents the discussion.

## Chapter 3: Findings

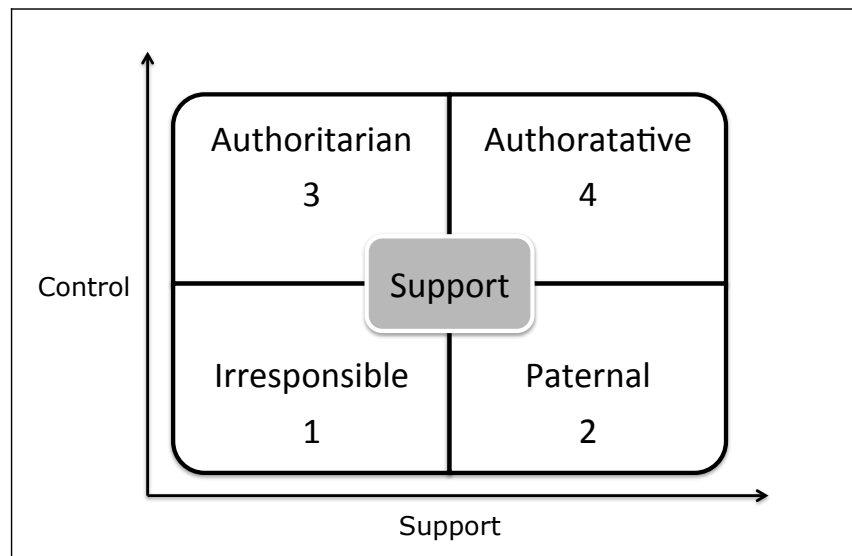
### Critical Analysis

Three urban high school students of Mexican descent were interviewed in this study. The students told their personal story of what it was like to be a student. Common experiences, key words, and phrases that were used by the students, were highlighted and coded using a modified gateway approach (Mears, 2009). The common phenomena were identified as themes if two or more of the students had similar experiences. The themes, listed alphabetically, that emerged were: adversity, college, discrimination friends/peer pressure, language barriers, parent/family support, pride, responsibility, and teacher support.

Figure 1 demonstrates different parenting styles and the level of support and control they give and have. The graph shows quadrant 1 as an irresponsible parent. This parent has no control over his or her child and gives little or no support. In quadrant 2 this parent gives a high amount of support but has no control. Quadrant 3 is where the parent has high control but gives little or no support. The parent in quadrant 4 gives a high level of support but also maintains a high level of control. Academic achievement increases with authoritative parents because they are highly involved in their child's education (Winsler et al., 2005). This graphic can be adapted to represent teachers, friends, or schools. Many educators support the students in their classrooms and yet the gap between White and Hispanic students persists. By reflecting on the graph the teacher, school

community, or friends are able to determine which quadrant they fit into. They can then see if they are providing high support and maintaining high control.

**Figure 1. Parenting Styles**



### **Parent/Family Support**

The importance of parent involvement is a critical factor in the academic success of Hispanic students' education (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Formoso et al., 2007; Rodriguez et al., 2009; Stein et al., 2009). Hispanic parents are viewed as being disinterested in education. Teachers believe parent involvement is primarily attending parent-teacher conferences (Espinoza & Laffey, 2003). The typical narrative of Hispanic

parents is authoritarian and permissive (Rodriguez et al., 2009). The students in this study reported that strong, caring, authoritative parental support helped him or her succeed in school.

Maria's parents were both supportive and encouraging in their style of parenting. "My dad ... played a big role in giving me strength...He would always tell us, "Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do anything because you're always going to do better than you think you can. You never know how well you're going to do something until you actually try it." He would continue to push ... until I broke and I finally did what I did not think I could do. He would always tell me not to give up in school ... because, in the long run, no one is going to do the work for me. I have to do it myself.

My mom would say, "I don't know how to do this," so I would just sit down and try it on my own ...I would just pour out in tears. I would say, "Why do I have to do this? I want to quit school and I don't want to do this anymore." ... my mom would just sit there and say it's okay.

Maria's brother supported her by challenging her-he would tell her one thing in hopes that she would do the opposite..."my brother would mess around and he would say things like, "Oh, you're not going to make the team," or "You're not going to be able to do something."

Maria's sister was direct about what she expected from her. She wanted Maria to be better than she was showing because she knew Maria was capable of high quality work. "My sister is like my mom. She was in calculus and in sports and she did not let anybody put her down either. She pushed for all that she could give. In high school I got

a B and my sister would say, “Why is this grade a B? Can this grade be better than a B?” I would say, “It’s like a high B,” and she would say she did not care if it was a high B. She would say, “Can it be an A? If it can, then you need to be better. My sister has always been, and will always be, my inspiration.”

“I think the reason they [my family] give me some much pressure is because they know that I can do it and they want me to be the best I can be. I also know they want to be proud of me. Their way of supporting me is by putting pressure on me.”

Hispanic parents are able to support their children’s education at home. They may not be able to demonstrate how to do an assignment but Socorro’s parents are there to provide a place to study and to ask questions about the work being done. “Every night my parents asked me, “How are you doing in school?” If I tell them I am doing well, they ask me how every class is going. They care about what I do and how I’m doing it. If I do not do well in a class, they ask me why. They tell me, “Sit right here and do your homework and study a while.” By them telling me to do that, I listen to them and do what they say and my grades go up. Their encouragement and support helps me a lot.

Sofia parents have both high support and high control. They also motivate her through examples from their own families. “I have great parents that always have had high expectations for me, my future-and the same for my siblings. Having them always be on my case is a good thing because it keeps me focused. I think that’s why my parent’s expectations of me are high. My parents tell me don’t get pregnant and do the things you’re supposed to do. They keep me from going to parties ...I get really irritated because I feel like I deserve to go out. I think why can’t I go out ... then I remember what my



mom told me about ... one of my aunt's kids ... reading books, studying, and preparing himself. The other two [relatives] were party freaks. My uncle is now a doctor and the other two are now just beginning to go to college ... I won't end up like them. I will finish college on time."

### **Teacher Support**

The students all talked about supportive teachers. Teachers who are able to make connections and build relationships with their students are more likely to have successful and engaged students (Marzano, 2001, McTighe, 2005, Stronge, 2002). A teacher who challenged these students was one of the most powerful and effective strategies that all the students referenced. Many teachers believe that students that do not speak English are the same as low performing students and that they must learn English before they are able to learn to read or write (Waxman & Tellez, 2002). Some teachers believe that Spanish-speaking students should be taught using a direct instructional method where the teacher uses lecture, drill and practice, seatwork and remediation (Padron et al., 2002). Padron (2002) calls this "pedagogy of poverty" because students are given instruction and work independently with the teacher and have very little interaction or dialog with other students and the teacher. Many of the teachers these students had were very supportive in the interactions they had with the students to have them learn how to speak English, read books, and write. The typical teacher will give students assignments and support the student in class. "My teacher encouraged me and kept giving more work" Maria's teacher challenged her with additional work as she began to master the work she did. "My teachers believed in me, and they started giving me normal work like the other students. They

weren't just focusing on me...my teacher gave me chapter books to read. She believed in me, and she gave me a whole chapter book ... I was like okay, and she would say, "Can you do it?" and I would say, "I can do it..." She would push me and push me even if there were times I would say that I couldn't do it anymore. I would get tired, frustrated, and irritated. Teachers helped me become independent." Maria felt that she was being treated the same as other students and not being singled out. But at the same time she was give high levels of support and the teacher was maintaining a high level of control of Maria's education and needs.

Socorro had teachers that were not as supportive as others. In the typical narrative of a teacher believing he or she is being supportive the teacher does approach the student and asks questions, check on the student and if there are no questions from the student then the teacher moves on to the next student. "There were teachers who would always make sure that they would ask me to see if I was doing okay, and to see if I understood or did not understand. I would usually nod to tell them "yes" or "no," because I usually never understood them at the beginning." They do not investigate to see if the student understood by asking probing questions or looking at the work the students is doing. It is simply; do you have any questions?

On the counter narrative a teacher that gives high support and has a high level of control the student feels challenged and wants to do well in class. Socorro spoke about the support his teachers gave him. "Most of the teachers challenge me to do better and help me when I have difficulty. I have had some teachers who have been pushy...they tell me, You can do it, don't be lazy and just go watch TV or get on the computer. Just take

some time and do it...They always encouraged me and told me to do better. They would tell me, "You can do better than this...If I did okay on the test and I got a B, they would push me more to get an A. They would help me out ... Whether I need something at school or even away from school, they would always be there for me. It felt good for them to encourage me and push me because I had somebody that believed in me.

Teachers challenge me by asking me what my grade is. I will tell them and then they will tell me to get a higher grade. I get a higher grade they tell me that I will be something."

Sofia had teachers that recognized that she was capable of working at a higher level than she was at and needed to be challenged. "My teacher...was always asking the other teachers who had more advanced classes to give me the chance to be put in there. She wanted to give me the chance to be in more advanced classes." My teacher finally got me in the more advanced, English-speaking classes in fourth and fifth grade. I feel like there are some teachers that are here for me. They believe I can do it. So it is a challenge to try and prove them right."

Typically the teacher will give additional work, ignore the student, or ask the student to help other students in the class. There are teachers that Sofia has had that are in the classroom but do not teach. "I feel like there are teachers who do not care about Hispanics. They show little attention. I feel like their attention is just towards the American students and not me or the other Hispanic students. I have had teachers who don't give any attention towards the entire class.

These students believed teachers played a big part in their success as students. The students all spoke highly of the teachers who supported them and what teachers did

to support and motivate them. They believed their teachers' support is what helped them to become successful students. All of the students repeated stories of a teacher whom they felt made the difference between their knowing and not knowing how to speak English. Some of these students had teachers that were not engaged with them or did not provide them with support. Each student described teachers who helped and supported him or her throughout his or her educational career. They each spoke of how the teacher made them feel and what was expected of them. Whether it was a teacher, who encouraged, challenged, or just listened, the positive impact the teacher made was repeated several times in all of their narratives.

### **Pride**

These students showed pride in what they did. This is counter to what many believe when it comes to Hispanic students. Hispanics are prone to failure, alienated and unmotivated, and dropout prone (Woloszyk, 1996). These students were proud of their abilities and were motivated to achieve and all three wanted to graduate from high school and go to college. The students wanted to become successful not only for themselves but for other Hispanic students. All three students were proud of the accomplishments they had achieved contrary to the stereotypical view of Hispanic students not caring about education. These students showed pride despite the belief that many people have about Hispanic students not being interested in learning or in achieving academic success (Valencia, 2002), all three students in this study believed that education is important to their future success.

Maria demonstrates pride from her accomplishments. She stated: “Since I was little it was hard to be a student...I really got the sense of being a student and feeling important. I was on the principal’s honor role and I felt like school gave me a sense of achievement that I couldn’t do at home...Each activity I have been in has helped me to become more independent and has shaped me into an overachieving student...The word student gives me chills, but, at the same time, it creates a smile on my face that goes from ear to ear, I am proud to be a student.”

Socorro is proud of being a learner and sees it linked to a successful future. He stated, “When I learn something new, I feel like, Wow, I never knew that and that’s one more thing I know now and I will keep for the rest of my life. I want to do well in school because I want to have a future.”

Sofia is proud of her heritage and her success within this system. “A lot of people do not see life that way-they just say, “I’ll go where ever life takes me.” Being a Latina student makes me proud.”

### **Resilience**

Language barriers, friends/peer pressure, adversity, and discrimination can have defeating qualities if a student is not resilient. These students seemed immune to the negativity that was around them. These four things could have brought them down, but they used them as motivation to move toward their goals.

In the typical narrative about Hispanic students they are prone to failure, alienated, and likely to dropout of school. These students felt accountable to other

Hispanic students, to teachers, and to themselves. Responsibility toward oneself and toward others is evident in the students' stories.

Maria stated, "I'm doing this for them, not just for me. I want to basically live for them in a way to show them ... show that us being Hispanic and Latino are not just dropouts. We are not all dumb or lazy and there are some of us that want to keep going. We want to do well and be successful."

Socorro, "I need to prove that I can do this. I need to prove it to my parents and to anybody who has ever put me down, but most of all prove to myself that going to school is the whole meaning of being successful in life."

Sofia, "I always do my own thing and don't let anybody bring me down. I have had Hispanic friends that feel like they don't belong here."

This effort is contrary to the deficit research showing high Hispanic dropout rates and low achievement (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). The stereotypical narrative is that these things, language barriers, friends/peer pressure, discrimination, and adversity, would defeat them; these are the things that empowered these three students. The fact that they are not part of the generalized norm gave them strength and a sense of responsibility greater than themselves to prove to friends, family, themselves, and other that they can achieve success.

### **Language Barriers**

Language for each of the three students has been a challenge. Although these three students did not speak English when they entered school they had the support from teachers and friends to quickly learn English. Hispanic students with language barriers

are less engaged in school and more likely to drop out of school (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). These three students are highly engaged and much is due to their ability to speak and understand English. They continue to learn English with the support of teachers and the thought of becoming successful. They believe if they learn English they will have more success and a better future.

Maria: “The challenge that I face is I don't know all of the English language. I don't know what a word is and I don't always want to be just like pulling out my little dictionary...I may never know all of the words in the English language that I need to know.” She has more words than she knows and is able to articulate her goals and dreams because she is successful.

Socorro has ambitions to be successful, “My parents told me if I tried my best in school and learned English, I could get into higher-level classes in elementary and middle school, and eventually graduate from high school. By doing well in school, they told me I could get better jobs than they have. They told me if I graduate from high school, I wouldn't have to work hard like they do.”

### **Friends/Peer Pressure**

From the perspective of these three Hispanic students, friends were both positive and negative. Creative tension existed between the students and some of their friends and peers. Creative tension comes from where someone wants to be, their goal, and where they currently are (Senge, 2006). Friends can influence us by having us move toward our goals or they can influence us to set our goal lower or higher. Where we want to be

and where we are is the gap that holds the energy and motivation to move. Some of the friends these students had felt their current situation needed no movement.

Sofia: "I have had some Hispanic friends who say, "We are not getting anywhere in life and this isn't even our country. Why are you trying so hard? Nobody cares." At first when they used to tell me that, it kind of made sense because I thought that there was not a lot of people that cared about what we Hispanics did. That is when I started slacking last year. They believe their current reality is ok and there is no need to do better or set a goal for something more. Sofia's current reality was not where she wanted to be. She had a goal and was motivated to do more to make the change from her current reality to her goal. "But then, I realize that I am my own person and I have to do what I need to do and not what the person next to me is doing because they are not the ones that have my back. I had who I thought was a friend last year that used to call me a nerd. She would say, "Why are you such a nerd; why are you doing your work." (This friend is living her current reality) She would tell me, "Let's go skip class." When she would skip class the only thing she would do is stand across the street from the school." Sofia wants more than the current reality. "I thought to myself, why would I waste my time and stand across the street."

Socorro had friends who were supportive and motivated him to achieve his goals. "Some of my friends and classmates would try to help me. They would keep pushing me and tell me to do better. If I did something that was wrong, they would help me out by saying, "No, try this or try it this way." Some of my friends would say they can do things



better than me. It would become a challenge and we would challenge each other to see who could do better.

Maria's friends question her to see why she is does so much. "My friends who are in the ESL program ask me, "What are you doing?" They see that I am involved in a lot of different things and I talk to a lot of people. I think I'm very friendly towards everyone. Some of her friends say thing that question her motivation but she is determined to be successful and uses the negativity to push forward. "...but my friends, at times, give me negative energy or tell me negative things. Even though they say things that are negative I think actually they're proud of me for trying to show that we, [other Hispanic students] we can do the schoolwork and go on to college.

### **Adversity**

Over coming adversity is difficult for many people. If you are told you are not able to achieve enough times then you may begin to believe it. These students overcame adversity from many sources and used the negativity to move forward. The creative tension within each student was strengthened as they were determined to prove they could do what they wanted. The interaction of challenges with the external supports led more to success than failure.

Socorro: "I think one of the hardest things that I'm going to have to overcome is when people tell me that I can't do something or they put me down. I may think, "Maybe they are right and maybe I can't do this." But I do have friends who will come up and tell me not to listen to those people. They tell me, "You can do this and you need to just keep on going... teachers I had... told me I could be a success if I try."

Maria understands she will need to be on her own but knows there are supports for her to rely on when she needs them. “I know now that there are people that will support me—just not every second that I need help. At times I get scared and think that I'm not going to have anybody there to support me. I'm trying to become independent and realize there will be people at some points in my life that will help me when I need it.”

Adversity made the student's stronger because they were motivated and gained strength from it. When others questioned them about their goals; their current reality was not where they wanted to be and they continued to move toward the goals they set for themselves.

### **Discrimination**

“In 2002, 75% of Hispanics said discrimination was a problem in schools. Just five years later in 2007, 84% reported the same” (Richard Fry & Gonzales, 2008, p. 9). Feelings of discrimination were evident in the students' stories. Even though discrimination exists, Hispanics rated their experiences in school as positive (Peterson et al., 2004). These students did not let other students' attitudes define them. They took what was said and used it as motivation to do even better.

Socorro: “There have been times where other students said things that were not nice. I have had classmates that have tried to put me down. They say things like, “Oh, you're a Mexican” or “You're Hispanic.” They would say things like, “You're worthless and you can't speak any English,” or they would just talk in English and say, “You look at the Mexican over there—he doesn't speak in English.” And the thing about that is what they said made me mad. I would show them that I was a whole lot better than them. I

would say, “Excuse me, what did you say?” They would just look at me and say, “What the...?” Socorro could have retaliated but he chose to demonstrate his ability not directly with the other students but by showing them that he can do well in school regardless of his ethnicity. “I had to show them that I was different than what they thought I was. I would do my schoolwork and, when I got my papers back from the teacher, I would go and show them what I had done. They would realize that I was getting better grades than they were even though I am Hispanic.”

Sofia has seen discrimination at school but wants to be accepted into a group. “It has been harder for me to fit in with the right group of people because this high school is mainly American, and Hispanics are looked at differently. I think it's hard to break into groups here in high school because they discriminate and look at me different.” She finds it difficult to listen to the other students that are discriminating or telling racist jokes but she does not allow them to prevent her from becoming successful. She chooses to attend a school that would give her more opportunities rather than be comfortable with the people she identifies with. “I could have gone to a different high school that had mostly Hispanic students but I came here because it is what my parents knew was best for me. There are a lot of racist jokes and quotes that really hurt but many of the students find normal. Many Hispanics I know are loud and don't care what people say or think about them. So, it is hard to fit into a group who look at Hispanics and judge them in a certain ways. It is difficult to be yourself in groups like that.”

## College

Fewer than 55 percent of Hispanic students graduate from high school and only 12 percent of all Hispanics receive a bachelors degree by age 29 (Aud et al., 2010). The narrative is that few Hispanic students go to college. If 45% of students do not graduate from high school then they certainly are not going to go to college. These students are counter to the norm of Hispanic students not caring about education and wanting to go to college. Not knowing about college has not deterred these students from wanting to go.

Maria: "...when I became a sophomore, my friend asked me, "I know it is early but do you have a college in mind?" And I thought, "College?" When I was a sophomore is when I actually started thinking about college. My career was pretty set since I was in middle school but I never thought, "Well I have to go to college for my career." "Oh, I'll get out of high school and I will be a surgeon." I never thought that I had to go to college, med school, and then do an internship for years... I better prepare myself in school for college. I never thought I had to go to college before medical school. I never knew medical school existed. It never occurred to me that it did because no one talked to me about it."

Socorro: "The reason I started thinking about college in middle school was because of the teachers I had. They told me I could be a success if I try and do my best. When I go to college, I'm going to need a lot more self-confidence. I know that I'm going to have to try a lot harder and put in my mind that I'm going to do this even though my family is not with me."

Sofia: “I know that there are a lot of Hispanics that drop out of school. I want to graduate and hopefully graduate with a scholarship [for college]. I know that I can accomplish my goal if I focus. I'm not sure where I am going to college. I do not know much about college other than I know there is a lot of homework. It is nothing like high school from what I've heard from other people. I think college is way more than my imagination can go at this time.”

### **Conclusion**

The students in this study are not the norm or the stereotypical at-risk Hispanic student. They are the students that are resilient and they know what they want from school and from life. They have parents who are highly supportive. They have had teachers that are enthusiastic, able to motivate these students, and were able to connect with them. There has been adversity in their lives but they have taken that adversity and used it to become inspired to achieve their goals. These are some of the 55% of Hispanic students that do graduate from high school and they are the ones that believe they have a future.

## **Chapter 4: Student Stories**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides the opportunity to meet three students of Mexican descent through their personal stories. These stories give the reader the opportunity to better understand these three Hispanic students, their environment and experiences of being a student through the stories they shared. The participants in this study were three urban high school students in a school in Colorado.

As the students shared his or her story, each told what it was like for him or her to be a student. Critical to this study was the effort to encourage the students to find and express their voices through their own stories. All three students spoke about the success they each had as a student and about the struggles they had to overcome to accomplish their level of understanding to be academically successful. The stories are compiled from the original transcripts where the students spoke about being a student, and discussed the role of their teachers, family and friends, adversity, language barriers, discrimination, and college aspirations. Transcripts were written verbatim and were then organized from a chronological perspective, from when the students were young up to the time of the interviews and into their perceived future, in order to provide the reader a story format with a beginning and an end. Each student's story starts with elementary school and ends with future goals beyond high school and college.

The stories are in the student's own voice and the students' entire stories are written. The names of the students are pseudonyms for the students' actual names.

## **Students' Stories**

### **Maria's Story**

Since I was little, it was hard to be a student. In the first place, because coming from a Hispanic family, you just know Spanish. Even though it was hard, it feels good to be a student. I know that there are a lot of things that I can do as a student. I have been in different classes, clubs and sports. I get to choose the classes I want to take, and I am able to try out new things to push myself to be better than I am today. Being a student has been a good experience for me. I have had support and help from both family and from teachers.

My kindergarten teacher taught me everything I know now. Without her help, I would have never been in first or second grade and I would have never made it to high school. She helped me learn English and without her I would not have been in Student Council or anything else. I wouldn't have been able to understand what people were telling me. She made me folders and put materials in them like worksheets and basic words that I need to know that helped me learn English. She was a lot of help and she gave me what I needed because, at the time I started kindergarten, all I knew in English were two words, "hi" and "bye." I know what it is like for other students to be in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. They comprehend some English or know a little bit, but I simply knew "hi" and "bye." How was I supposed to get by with just that, just knowing those two words and not knowing anything else? My brother and sister knew English but, since they were in school too, they didn't have the time to teach me. The only person I relied on was my kindergarten teacher. She is the one person that really got me here. My kindergarten teacher helped me with pronunciation, writing my letters, writing in cursive, and-really-she encouraged me to push myself to learn. I learned more and more each day, and she gave me more and more encouragement.

After kindergarten, I went to a different school and they saw what I was doing, and they were trying to get me to speak even better. My teacher in first grade wanted to see what level I was at. She realized that I could do certain things okay and some things were harder for me. She gave me a variety of things to practice on, like reading books, so I could learn how to pronounce words that I had not heard before. My teacher encouraged me and kept giving more work. If I got stuck, I was sometimes scared to ask help because I would say to myself, "I don't know how they're going to be. How are they going to treat me?" I knew that they would help me but, at the same time, I did not know for sure what their response

would be, so I was kind of scared to ask for help. After a while, they would come over and see that I was stuck and they would ask if I need some help; and I would say, "How do you do this?" or I would just point. Like when I was in kindergarten, -if I wasn't sure what I was supposed to ask, I would just point and my teacher would know what I was talking about. She would tell me that people would always help me. She worked with me throughout first grade and I made it to second grade.

The teachers were more confident that I could talk in English, read, and do a lot of things that the other students were doing. My teachers believed in me, and they started giving me normal work like the other students. They weren't just focusing on me and just trying to get me to comprehend. I was actually working with the class. Because I was in a regular class with other students, I could hear what they were talking about and what they're saying, so I started learning from my friends. They helped me to know what different things were, and they would say, "This is called 'this'," or "This is called 'that'."

When I moved into the third grade, I was just by myself. What I mean is, I was no longer "special," instead I was becoming more independent. I was introducing myself to new kids. I would say, "Hi, my name is Maria." I became more independent throughout the year since my friends helped teach me English. In fourth and fifth grade, I was friendly. I was more outgoing, and it was as if I had always known how to speak English. It was normal to me; I knew English and Spanish. The other students knew I was different but they accepted me. Teachers began to focus on what I could do. They began to see that I was smart and that I really liked school. I liked school because it was something different rather than just being home. I got to be involved with my friends, played sports, and really got the sense of being a student and feeling important. I won awards in middle school and, in elementary, I was on the principal's honor roll. I felt like school gave me a sense of achievement that I really couldn't do at home. In school, I got to meet a lot of new people and friends. I was really outgoing; It was like I was part of them. I didn't feel different from them at all.

In fifth grade, my teacher gave me chapter books to read. She believed in me, and she gave me a whole chapter book because, in fifth grade, it was a big deal going from little kid books to chapter books. We had reading logs and she would say, "Read so many pages or so many minutes per week." I was like okay, and she would say, "Can you do it?" and I would say, "I can do it." At the end of the week, she would have all the students write a summary or tell her about the book we had read. She would do that individually with each student. I would tell her, "This happened in this part and that happened in that part," and she would be saying, "How do you get that just by that little bit of reading?" She would be amazed that I comprehended as much as I did by just reading a small section and being able to predict what was going to happen in the story. She saw something



different and saw what I was capable of doing, and that I could actually read and comprehend what was happening in the book very well. She would say, "Okay, now you're going to go up a level in the chapter books." She would push me and push me even if there were times I would say that I couldn't do it anymore. I would get tired, frustrated, and irritated. My teacher would say, "You can do it." She would say, "Sometimes it's okay to get frustrated and irritated because it is hard, nothing is easy, but you're going to get there."

Teachers helped me become independent because first they helped me individually, and then they put me out there where I had to take care of myself. I had to know what to say in order to respond to someone when they were asking me a question. As time went by and the teachers weren't there to help me, my mom helped me. I would tell her what I was doing and she would not know how to help me with my schoolwork because she only went as far as the sixth grade. My mom would say, "I don't know how to do this," so I would just sit down and try it on my own because I knew I did not have a teacher there to help me. I had to rely on myself. My teachers began letting me do my own things and to be involved with my group. Teachers weren't always going to be there to help me, and they wanted me to do things on my own. When I would ask for help once in awhile, they would say, "Okay, I will help you," but they would tell me that, "Once you're at the next level, the teachers are going to help less. Teachers at each higher level want you to be able to do things without holding your hand."

In fifth grade, my teacher would say, "You're going to the sixth grade and in sixth grade they're not going to help you as much. In high school, they're going to help you even less and definitely not hold your hand in everything you do; so you have to learn how to talk to other people, do the work, and turn it in on time and not wait until the last minute to ask for help. Teachers will help you when you ask but not like we are now. We are trying to get you ready for middle school, and, in middle school, they are going to get you ready for high school."

My teachers were getting me ready for each level of school by teaching me how to be independent. The teachers knew that in high school there are so many people that the teachers are not going to sit down with you individually like the teachers did when I was in elementary and in middle school. After middle school, I didn't have anybody holding my hand anymore. I joined even more clubs and sports to try to get that sense of independence and not be scared to be on my own. At times, I would get scared and think that I'm not going to have anybody there to support me. I know now that there are people that will support me-just not every second that I need help. The subjects have gotten more challenging than when I was in middle school, even though I was in advanced classes. I know English but I still need to learn a lot more. Some students have English as their first language and, of course, they know much more English than I do. They sometimes say words or phrases and I say to myself, "What is that?" I wasn't scared before when

I needed to ask what something was-well, I was scared, but I would still ask and now I question myself; “Should I ask, am I going to look dumb because I don't know what that is?” That is the challenge that I face because I don't know all of the English language. I don't know what a word is and I don't always want to be just like pulling out my little dictionary. I am kind of adapting to the words that other students use. I speak slang often; therefore I don't always use formal or big words. I'm kind of insecure about that-trying to not look dumb in front of them just because I don't know what they are saying even though, to them, they are just simple everyday words.

My dad has been in and out and kind of nowhere at all. My dad has never really been in the picture but he played a big role in giving me strength. He is strong both physically and mentally. He would always tell us, “Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do anything because you're always going to do better than you think you can. You never know how well you're going to do something until you actually try it.” He would always push us and tell us, “Don't let anybody ever tell you, you can't do something because you can prove them wrong. Yes, you may fail the first time and ten more times.” If I did something wrong, he would say, “Oh, my god,” then get really mad and frustrated. He would say, “Did you learn from that? Go ahead and try it again, and try again, and try again.” I would say, “Oh, my god, I can't.” He would continue to push and push and push me until I broke and I finally did what I did not think I could do. He played a great role in my ability to keep trying until I can do something I want. There were times when he was here and he would talk to me. When my dad would call, one of the first things he would ask me was how I was doing in school. If I was suffering in school with grades, or if I were getting a B or a C, he would say, “Why is that a B, can that be better?” I would say, “Why is he mad at me?” I would realize that he wanted me to do better and he knew the consequences of not doing well in school. I also don't like having people mad at me, so I would do better. His attitude and way of encouraging me was not always the best, but it would help me out and I would realize that I could not slack off; I had to work harder. My dad does not have the calmest approach, but I know that when he is yelling at me or mad about how I am doing in school, it is because he really cares and he wants me to succeed and be the best person I can be. He says things the way he does because he wants me to step it up rather than to hurt me. My dad would try to help me with my math. He would tell me, “You can do this,” and he would have me do it over and over and over. He would always tell me, “Focus on school because school is going to be the biggest thing that's going to help you. He would say, “We [parents] are always going to help you, but school is the one that's going to help you the most.” My dad would tell me, “You're smart, you're intelligent and you know what you're doing. In the long run, school is going to shape your life.” He would always tell me not to give up in school or in sports. Yeah, my friends are there for me, but I have to have the confidence to know that I am able to do it on

my own because, in the long run, no one is going to do the work for me. I have to do it myself.

Another person that pushed me was my brother. He would mess around and he would say things like, “Oh, you're not going to make the team,” or “You're not going to be able to do something.” I would say, “Oh really? Are you sure about that?” He would kind of do it in a way that said, “You should prove me wrong.” He was making fun of me but he wanted me to succeed. Telling me, “You're not going to make the team,” or “You're not going to make straight A's” was his way to push me more towards proving him wrong. There would be times I would say, “Maybe he is right, maybe I really do suck and I'm not going to be able to do that.” He would just look at me and he would tell me, “What you going to do?” I would be like, “I don't know.” He would say, “How does it feel for me to say you're not going to be able to do something?” I would say, “It feels bad,” and he would just look at me and he would give me that glare. I would say, “I think you're trying to do this on purpose to have me prove you wrong.” When I did prove him wrong, he would just get a grin on his face and I would know that was what he was trying to do. He wanted me to prove everybody else wrong, and he was kind of testing me to see if I would say, “Yeah, you're right-I'm not going to make it.” Sometimes I would get myself down and he would want to see if I would live up to his challenge. I would say to myself, “I'm going to prove you wrong and I don't care what you say, I'm going to do what I have to do.” He kind of tested and challenged me in his own way.

My responsibilities have grown more in school and I have had to do things on my own. If I had to do a project or do research and I had to do that on my own, I would get frustrated at times and I would just pour out in tears. I would say, “Why do I have to do this? I want to quit school and I don't want to do this anymore.” I hated having to do the work, and my mom would just sit there and say, “It's okay.” It would be around 12 o'clock at night and I was still doing my project. My mom would tell me, “It's okay because, in the end, it's going to pay off and you're going to go to college and be something. You are going to look back and say, “That was easy work-now starts the real work.” She would be there supporting me. She wouldn't help me necessarily with the work itself because she didn't know what I was doing. I would ask her, “What do you think of this?” but most of the time she did not know. She would give me her input when she understood, but most of the time she was there with me for moral support. She gives me positive feedback and reminds me that I am going to look back on this and I'm going to be really thankful that I actually did this. I am glad I didn't quit because, if I had, then I wouldn't have gotten anywhere. She tells me, “Remember, you have big hopes,” and she would just talk to me and give me positive energy and just really pushes me to be independent and not give up. If she had not been here supporting me, I would have been out. I would have said, “I am done, no more work.”

Sometimes it is hard to keep on doing what I am doing. I get my strength from my mom. She has always strived to do what she can to provide for us. She has never given up, even on the simple things. For example, when looking in the refrigerator for food and I say, "I don't see anything in here that we can make," she would tell me to get out of the way and she would make a whole meal out of nothing that was there. She keeps going no matter what. It amazes me. My sister is like my mom. She keeps going. My sister was in the ESL program when she was in high school but she did not let that hold her back. She was in calculus and in sports, and she did not let anybody put her down either. She pushed for all that she could give. My sister has always been, and will always be, my inspiration.

When I was little, most of my friends would ask me, "Are you sure you can do this?" They would question me. Now, some of my friends ask me for help. I don't like bragging about myself if they ask me what my grades are or my GPA is. I tell them, but not in the bragging way to make them feel bad. My friends who are in the ESL program ask me, "What are you doing?" They see that I am involved in a lot of different things and I talk to a lot of people. I think I'm very friendly towards everyone but my friends, at times, give me negative energy or tell me negative things. Even though they say things that are negative, I think actually they're proud of me for trying to show that we [other Hispanic students] can do the schoolwork and go on to college. Overall though, I don't care what people think, it is what I know that matters. There are those of us that are capable of succeeding. Even though they may not be getting the help they need, it doesn't mean that all of us aren't getting help. Many of my friends actually give more support and they're proud of me. They say, "You know you can show everybody for all of us that we are smart and that we can do it," so they actually give me more support. I know there has been at least one person who said, "You think you're 'this'," or "You think you're 'that'-you just like to show off." I say, "Okay, sure I'm showing off because I am outgoing and hardworking." I just kind of put that in the back of my head and I look at the ones that are actually proud of me and push me more, I'm doing this for them, not just for me. By me being successful in class, I know it can give others some encouragement to do well also. I think, "I'm doing this and you can do it too." I started maybe like they did, from nothing, not knowing anything but "hi" and "bye," and now I'm becoming a lot of things and becoming something-someone.

I want to keep on going because of the simple fact that some people are capable of doing the schoolwork, but they may have some problems that they can't or have not overcome. I want to basically live for them in a way to show them what I can do, to show what I can be, and to show that us being Hispanic and Latino are not just dropouts. We are not all dumb or lazy and there are some of us that want to keep going. We want to do well and be successful. What keeps me going is just the fact that I want to be a better person and show everybody what I can do, what I'm capable of, and that my race matters. I just want to show everyone that the

simple fact is I'm a different person. Even though I am different than everybody else, everyone can do what he or she wants to do. They just need to push themselves and have the courage to overcome all of the big obstacles.

A big challenge I have is that I may never know all of the words in the English language that I need to know. I also know that there will be some subjects that I may not comprehend. It is a challenge to just realize that I have to accept that I may not know everything I need to know. I do have resources like books, and I do have friends who know things. I'm trying to become independent and realize there will be people at some points in my life that will help me when I need it, but also I need to realize that I'm not going to be able to do everything by myself.

Another challenge I face is not having support when I go off to college. I actually never thought about going to college before. When I was in middle school, I just worried about going to high school. That was what roamed in my head. I always wondered what it was going to be like to be a freshman in high school. Then, when I became a sophomore, my friend asked me, "I know it is early but do you have a college in mind?" And I thought, "College?" When I was a sophomore is when I actually started thinking about college. My career was pretty set since I was in middle school but I never thought, "Well, I have to go to college for my career." I just thought about high school, so it wasn't until my sophomore year that I started thinking about this big word "college." I had dreams about college and I wondered how it would be and I started seeing movies about what college is supposed to be like, and that's when I really started thinking what I was going to do and what I had to do to get into college in the first place. That's when I really started looking at college requirements and classes that they ask for. I never thought I had to go to college before medical school.

I had in my head what I wanted to do when I was young but I never realized that I had to go to college in order to become a surgeon. At first, I wanted to be a teacher and then, throughout middle school, I started liking science. I started getting more into science and biology, so I started thinking that I wanted to be a general surgeon or a doctor. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to operate. I just thought, "Oh, I'll get out of high school and I will be a surgeon." I never thought that I had to go to college, med school, and then do an internship for years. I am in anatomy class now and I want to see if I really would like to be a surgeon. In some of my classes, we've done some dissections and we dissected cow's heart. It didn't gross me out at all. I was all over it. At that time, I realized that being a surgeon was my passion. If I could not do the dissections, then, I knew that career was not for me and I just need four years of college for whatever my career was going to be. I've looked into the medical field and, yes, I'm going to become a surgeon. I better prepare myself in school for college. I never knew medical school existed. It never occurred to me that it did because no one talked to me about it. None of the people in my family have gone to college. Some of my

cousins in Mexico went to the University and I've had two cousins here in the United States who went to college, however, I will be the first in my family to go to college. Both my brother and sister graduated from high school. My mother went as far as, I think, the sixth grade. Coming from my family, I never thought that I would go beyond what anybody else could until I saw my brother and sister graduate from high school and thought, "I am very sure that I can graduate from high school also."

My parents have had a pretty hard life and they work hard but they really want what's best for me. After my brother graduated, he started working to help support the family. Right now, they just want me to focus on my education. I have had a lot of pressure from my family. All through middle school, I was always getting A's and then in high school I got a B and my sister would say, "Why is this grade a B? Can this grade be better than a B?" I would say, "It's like a high B," and she would say she did not care if it was a high B. She would say, "Can it be an A? If it can, then you need to be better." The pressure is a lot but I have learned how to deal with it. If I hadn't learned how to deal with the pressure, I think I would've just broken down. I think the reason they give me so much pressure is because they know that I can do it and they want me to be the best I can be. I also know they want to be proud of me. Their way of supporting me is by putting pressure on me. So far, I am able to handle it including all the other things I do.

I've played different sports like soccer, and I was on the flag football team and played with the eighth-grade boys. I was the only girl on the team. I've been in cross-country in sixth grade, but right now all I do is volleyball and swimming. I wanted to play soccer but I hurt my knee so I can't run. It seems that I'm always getting injured and my mom says, "What happened to you now?" Sports have really helped me because they take my mind off of school and relieve stress. I've been in a lot of different clubs. I have been in the National Junior Honor Society, Student Council, and as a mentor for freshmen in the Link Crew. Each activity I have been in has helped me become more independent and has shaped me into an overachieving student.

I think one of my biggest challenges will be to become completely independent. I need to know that I can be by myself and depend on me to become what I want to become. I know that I'm not going to have the support that I have now. I will have some support but not like I do right now. I still get a lot of help from my teachers and my family; and once I go off to college, it will be me fighting for my career and myself.

I'm pretty sure in the beginning, when I first go off to college, I will have the support I need-especially during my freshman year of college. I may fail the first couple of months because I'm not used to relying just on myself and not being able to depend on others. If I do fail the first few months, I will get used to being

independent and I will see what I'm capable of doing without anybody else helping me. I think not having constant support will help me become more independent. I will have to rely on myself and I think it will have a positive effect on me. Once I get to my career, I may say I don't know what to do, but I will know that I fought on my own to get to that point. I will have to become the student and person I never once thought I could be.

Right now, it feels good to be a student. Because I know that there are a lot of things that you can do. I can be in a club, learn new things, or I can be in a sport. I get enough out of just being a student. It gives me a kind of happiness inside because I know that being a junior right now and being an over achieving student has given me that sense of, "I have gotten here;" and I never thought I would be in high school as a freshman, sophomore or junior. Being in school feels good and I am able to call myself a student. The word "student" gives me chills, but, at the same time, it creates a smile on my face that goes from ear to ear. I am proud to be a student.

### **Socorro's Story**

My dad first came to the United States about 11 or 12 years ago. He wanted his family with him, so he worked a couple of years and then he sent for us and brought us to the United States. He wanted us to live better and have a lot more help than we could get in Mexico. In Mexico, it's hard because you have to have money to go to school and you have to pay to get an education. Having all of my brothers and sisters would have been expensive for all of us to get an education in Mexico. In the United States, you can get an education for free. I like being a student most of the time because I am somebody who goes to school. I listen to the teachers. I learn, and if I do what my teachers tell me to, I will become successful. As I go through each class, I'm always learning something new. When I learn something new, I feel like, "Wow, I never knew that and that's one more thing that I know now and I will keep for the rest of my life."

It was hard at first, coming from Mexico. When I first came to the United States, I was seven years old. I didn't speak any English until my friend started helping me. I met this girl who became my friend and she helped me a lot. If I needed somebody to translate for me-to at least understand something- she was there for me. And then there was another girl, and she would help me most of the time if I had any difficulties understanding or saying anything. There were teachers who would always make sure that they would ask me to see if I was doing okay, and to see if I understood or did not understand. I would usually nod to tell them "yes" or "no," because I usually never understood them at the beginning. My parents told me if I tried my best in school and learned English, I could get into higher-level classes in elementary and middle school, and eventually graduate from high school. By doing well in school, they told me I could get better jobs than they

have. They told me if I graduate from high school, I wouldn't have to work hard like they do.

When I was in first grade, the hardest thing for me was to understand what the teacher was saying. The reason for that was I did not speak English and I only spoke Spanish. My teacher did not speak Spanish. She had someone come in and translate for her. The only person that spoke Spanish was the ESL teacher. He is the one that helped me the most when I was in first grade.

My teachers would come to me, and bring somebody who spoke English and Spanish. The person who spoke Spanish would talk to the teacher and then the teacher would talk to them. That person would talk to me to check to see if I understood what the teacher was saying. I had a lot of help with math and reading with that person who translated. If I did not understand, she would sit right next to me and, little by little, she would slowly explain everything to me. Some teachers were good and they would help me out if I didn't understand or they would just tell me what it was I needed to know.

In the second grade, my English was a little bit better and I could understand a lot more of the language. I was still getting help with translation but not as much as I was in the first grade. By the time I was in third grade, my English was pretty good. I could understand most of what was being spoken and I only needed help on some things. There were things I did not understand, whether it was in English or Spanish. Math equations, science terms and procedures were some of those things I didn't understand and I needed help with. As the words got bigger, I had a harder time understanding what the teacher wanted and what I was supposed to do in class. I think that by the time I reached fourth and fifth grade, I knew about as much as every other person that spoke English or Spanish-but not as much English as I needed. Most of the time, I was with friends who spoke Spanish, but I did hang around with people who spoke English and even people who spoke other languages. I did not participate in school activities. After elementary, I went into middle school and classes were a lot different. In elementary school, we just had one teacher for the entire day. In middle school, we moved from teacher to teacher every hour. We did not get to really know the teacher like we did in elementary. The teachers just had you go do what you were supposed to do in classes. I did okay. I worked hard to learn enough English to speak well, and I was actually able to help other students who spoke less English than I did.

Some of my friends and classmates would try to help me. They would keep pushing me and tell me to do better. If I did something that was wrong, they would help me out by saying, "No, try this or try it this way." Some of my friends would say they can do things better than me. It would become a challenge and we would challenge each other to see who could do better. And a lot of times, we would end up about the same with the same scores and the same grades. We



started challenging each other when we were in elementary school. In middle school, we challenged each other even more. I would say, "Oh, I can do better than you," or they would say they could do better than me, so it would challenge us and it would show that we could do better; and that we do have the power and the ability to do well in school.

The people that have helped me the most are my teachers and my parents. Most of the time, the teachers push me to do better but there have been some teachers who don't think that I'm good enough to do well, so I have to show them I can do the work. Most of the teachers challenge me to do better and help me when I have difficulty. One of the hardest things that I've had to overcome to get to where I am today was learning the English language. My family has always encouraged me to go to school. They tell me, "Keep going and keep trying and don't give up. Teachers challenge me by asking me what my grade is. I will tell them and then they will tell me to get a higher grade. I get a higher grade; they tell me that I will be something. They also tell me if I get a higher grade, I will be a lot better in all subjects. It's not going to just help me in math or science, but it will help me in life. I think the things that have motivated me the most are when the teachers encouraged me or tell me I can do better. They would say, "I want to see you do better. I know you can do better." Just to hear them say, "I want you to do better," makes me try harder. It gives me strength to do my best.

I also get my strength from my parents. My dad is a construction worker and my mom is a housekeeper, and they work very hard. I think one of the hardest things that I'm going to have to overcome is when people tell me that I can't do something or they put me down. I may think, "Maybe they are right and maybe I can't do this." But I do have friends who will come up and tell me not to listen to those people. They tell me, "You can do this and you need to just keep on going." I have had times when there were family problems and I have had to work through those things and it takes time away from school.

There have been times where other students said things that were not nice. I have had classmates that have tried to put me down. They say things like, "Oh, you're a Mexican" or "You're Hispanic." They would say things like, "You're worthless and you can't speak any English," or they would just talk in English and say, "You look at the Mexican over there-he doesn't speak in English." And the thing about that is what they said made me mad. I would show them that I was a whole lot better than them. I would say, "Excuse me, what did you say?" They would just look at me and say, "What the...?" Sometimes classmates would say, "I'm smarter than you," because they were white and, "My parents are richer than yours." When people would say things like that, it would hurt me. Just because of the way that I look or the person that I am, they thought I was a certain way. I had to show them that I was different than what they thought I was. I would do my schoolwork and, when I got my papers back from the teacher, I would go and

show them what I had done. They would realize that I was getting better grades than they were even though I am Hispanic. It's not a very good feeling to have people treat you that way.

I have had some teachers who have been pushy, like if I have homework, they remind me constantly to do it. They tell me, "You can do it, don't be lazy and just go watch TV or get on the computer. Just take some time and do it." Other teachers I have had are ones that tell other students to help me. I didn't understand the way the teacher explained something and the teacher thought that I might understand it better the way a student would explain it to me. I've had a couple of favorite teachers. They always encouraged me and told me to do better. They would tell me, "You can do better than this." If I did okay on the test and I got a B, they would push me more to get an A. They would also help me out if I needed something. Whether I need something at school or even away from school, they would always be there for me. It felt good for them to encourage me and push me because I had somebody that believed in me. I had someone telling me, "I know you can do it, just try and keep on going." They would tell me, "Don't stop and don't give up." Some teachers that I have had have been more like, "You're on your own-if you don't get it, sorry." That doesn't work real well for me so, when that happens, I get students and other friends to help me out.

The hardest thing about school is having the desire to do the work. You have to have the desire to go to school, do the work, listen to teachers, control your anger, and not go off on the teachers. The most difficult subject I'm having right now is science. In the past, I did okay in science but it has gotten harder. English is sometimes all right, but I have a hard time with writing. I do okay in math but I usually have difficulty with history because of the words. They are bigger, longer, and they are much harder. I usually don't hear those words, in other classes like math or English.

I want to do well in school because I want to have a future. I want to do well and I want to do better than my parents have done. My parents have even told me that they don't want to see me working the way that they do-getting low wages for lots of work, and they don't want people taking advantage of me because I'm Hispanic. When I'm at home, I speak Spanish with my parents all the time. I do speak English with my siblings. Every night my parents asked me, "How are you doing in school?" If I tell them I am doing well, they ask me how every class is going. They care about what I do and how I'm doing it. If I do not do well in a class, they ask me why. I explain to them why I am not doing well or tell them if I didn't understand something. Sometimes I tell them it was my fault and I didn't want to do anything. My parents always encourage me. If I had a grade that was a "C," they would tell me, "You could do better." They tell me, "Sit right here and do your homework and study a while." By them telling me to do that, I listen to them

and do what they say and my grades go up. Their encouragement and support helps me a lot. Both my mom and dad help me.

My dad only went to middle school, and I think my mom only went to elementary school but maybe to middle school. I have two brothers and two sisters and they are all younger than I am. Most of my brothers and sisters do pretty well in school. One of my brother's struggles because of the people he hangs out with. They influence the way he acts in school. But my other brother and sisters do okay in school. One of them will start school next year.

None of my relatives have ever gone beyond high school and I don't think any of them even graduated. My goals are to continue high school and learn as much as possible. I want to graduate from high school and then hopefully go to college and graduate. I started thinking about going to college when I was in middle school. The reason I started thinking about college in middle school was because of the teachers I had. They told me I could be a success if I try and do my best. My parents have told me if I want to have a good job, I need to do my best in school. One day, I want to be able to give my children a better life. I think that it's going to be hard in college because all of the writing that I will have to do. When I go to college, I'm going to need a lot more self-confidence. I know that I'm going to have to try a lot harder and put in my mind that I'm going to do this even though my family is not with me.

I want to study to become a pilot or anything that has to do with business. I've always had an interest in planes. I want to know what it is like in other places. I want to go around the world and see the different people and places-not just live in one place. Some of the things I want to learn are different languages. I want to learn as many languages as I can because it is an interest of mine. I want to travel and learn new things from different people in different cultures. I think that, if I am a pilot, I would be able to go around the world to see all the places I have heard of and maybe some that I have never heard of.

I'm interested in business because I think I'm a good salesperson. I'm interested in making money and, by learning business in college; I think it would be a good way to learn how to make more money.

I don't know much about college. If I do go to college, I'll probably go somewhere around here in Colorado. I've been in Colorado most of my life so I would probably stay here. I need to realize that I am doing all of this for my good. I need to do this to have a better life for myself and have a good job, car, house, and a good family. I need to prove that I can do this. I need to prove it to my parents and to anybody who has ever put me down, but most of all prove to myself that going to school is the whole meaning of being successful in life. Being a student

and learning as much as possible will get me to the level I want so I can become whoever or whatever I want. All I have to do is try.

### **Sofia's Story**

Being a student is really important for me. Being part of this study called "Successful Hispanic Students" lets me know I am succeeding in a positive way, and lets me know that there is someone out there who cares and has noticed me. To be a student here in the United States is a great honor because I know that, if I do what I need to do here at school, I will get to where I want to be. A lot of people do not see life that way—they just say, "I'll go wherever life takes me." But it's not always good to just live in the moment. School is easy if you want to make it easy, you just have to do what you're supposed to be doing at school. Being a Latina student makes me proud. It's good to be yourself, always focus on what you're supposed to be doing at school.

I started preschool when I lived in Alaska. After kindergarten, we moved to Colorado and I've been here ever since. When I was in Boulder, they didn't have report cards or teacher conferences so my parents had no access to how I was doing at school. My grandmother was a teacher in Mexico. She taught me my home language, which was Spanish. She taught me how to read and write it because my parents are really busy people because of their business. Meanwhile, school taught me the English language. Knowing both languages has helped me a lot.

In first grade, I did struggle because my grandma had taught me a lot of Spanish and my English was not great. I think first grade was probably the hardest. I had ESL class from first grade through fifth grade. The ESL classes were great! I do remember that in those classes there were students who did not speak English at all, which meant that most of the classes were taught in Spanish—but they included some English. My ESL teacher in Boulder was always asking the other teachers who had more advanced classes to give me the chance to be put in there. She wanted to give me the chance to be in more advanced classes. When I was in third grade, teachers wanted me to be moved to fifth grade math, but my parents said, "No," since they didn't want me missing my fourth grade. My ESL teacher finally got me in the more advanced English-speaking classes in fourth and fifth grade. So I believe that helped me a lot. In elementary, we really did not have report cards so my parents never really knew or cared about what was going on, but when I went into sixth grade they saw my first ever report card which had only A's and B's. Then after that, they would ask me, "Why couldn't all of them just be A's?" So, in seventh grade, they were just waiting for me to have straight A's on my report card. They also always had good notes about me from the teachers at conferences in middle school. So, ever since sixth grade, they've wanted straight A's on my report card and good comments about me by the teachers.

I did not participate in any activities throughout elementary. I did participate in activities in middle school, such as volleyball, soccer, and Student Council. The middle school I went to had mostly Hispanic students. It was really easy for me to get along with people there because they all spoke Spanish and we all had the same cultural roots. Middle school for me was very easy when it came to socializing because I could always turn around and find somebody to talk to. If I ever needed help, there was always a teacher to help me.

Here in high school, I barely have friends but I do have some good friends here. I don't get to see some of my good friends here in high school very much because they are in the ESL classes, and I haven't had ESL classes ever since sixth grade after I passed several tests. I could have gone to a different high school that had mostly Hispanic students but I came here because it is what my parents knew was best for me. It has been harder for me to fit in with the right group of people because this high school is mainly American, and Hispanics are looked at differently.

I think it's hard to break into groups here in high school because they discriminate and look at me different. There are a lot of racist jokes and quotes that really hurt, but many of the students find me normal. Many Hispanics I know are loud and don't care what people say or think about them. There are American students that will look at them and say, "What are you doing? Calm down." American students do not see you as a person to hang around with because of the difference in cultures. So, it is hard to fit into a group who look at Hispanics and judge them in a certain ways. It is difficult to be yourself in groups like that.

I had who I thought was a friend last year that used to call me a nerd. She would say, "Why are you such a nerd; why are you doing your work?" She would tell me, "Let's go skip class." When she would skip class, the only thing she would do is stand across the street from the school. I thought to myself, "Why would I waste my time and stand across the street?" So, she used to call me a nerd over and over. One of my teachers had this basket where we turned in our work. My so-called friend used to take the work I put into the basket out, and she would copy the work that I did. My teacher would ask why we have the exact same words on our papers. I knew that my friend was taking my papers and copying them. I did not want to be mean to her and turn her in, but I went to my teacher to talk to her one-on-one. I told her that my friend was taking my papers and copying them just so she could get the grade. That was really hard for me because you really can't throw a friend over, (Throwing a friend over is when you are snitching or telling on a friend.) But, I also could not risk my grade. I really didn't want to tell on her because I barely had any friends and I didn't want to lose one of the few that I had. At first, I thought it was kind of rude that she would call me a nerd and a dork and that she would copy off of me. I would tell her, "You're getting good grades like me but without doing any work." It wasn't fair. She was

using me trying to get higher grades. I know a lot of people who are like that. They try to use me instead of doing their work for themselves. I don't want to be rude and say, "No, don't copy me," so I turn in my work just as soon as I am finished with it. They know that I am capable of doing my work right and I'm going to get a good grade on it, so they want to copy off of me so that they can get a good grade too.

I think people try to copy off me because they want to just do things fast. They don't care if they learn-they just want to have a good grade and have time to socialize. Yesterday, when I finished my work early, the teacher asked me if I wanted to go take a walk, go to the library, or help out my classmates. That makes me feel good. It was a reward for finishing early. I don't appreciate when other students go to the basket and take out my work and copy it. I feel as if they should be doing their own work. I don't think that copying somebody else is ever good because you don't learn the things that you need to learn. When they have to take the test and the person they copied from is across the classroom, how are they going to copy then? How are you going to get the grades and pass the test if all you ever did was copy someone else?

I think high school is pretty easy. I've heard people say, "Oh, this is so hard, I can't take this anymore." I tell them, "Well, if you would just pay attention in class and show up, then it's really easy to pass the test and the class." Every Monday, our math teacher will give us homework for the rest of the week. I'll finish it before the end of the class period and I don't have to worry about it for the rest of the week. My teacher says, "You know you don't have to turn that in till next Monday." I'll tell her, "Well, it is done," with a smile on my face. It's good to focus on the work and get things done because you can just get sidetracked easily with all the distractions after school, like with the Internet and cell phones. Right now, I think a lot of people just care about their friends and their social life. I don't care about it much because I know that it is mostly drama. There is the teenage rebellious part of everybody, and last year was my year to try to slack off. I had an English teacher and she was always there to tell me to focus and to think about what I'm doing before I start doing things I'm not supposed to. She was always there to listen and to keep me on track.

I have had some Hispanic friends who say, "We are not getting anywhere in life and this isn't even our country. Why are you trying so hard? Nobody cares." At first when they used to tell me that, it kind of made sense because I thought that there was not a lot of people that cared about what we Hispanics did. That is when I started slacking last year. But then, I realize that I am my own person and I have to do what I need to do and not what the person next to me is doing because they are not the ones that have my back. In order to get somewhere in life, I have to take care of myself because my friends are not going to. I guess I feel different

than they do because I was actually born here in the United States and I probably have more opportunities than they do.

I always do my own thing and don't let anybody bring me down. I have had Hispanic friends that feel like they don't belong here. For a while, I thought that was true about me too, but if my parents are going to put a lot of hard work into me, I might as well put a lot of hard work into my future. I do think that a lot of Hispanics think this way because they come here illegally. I was born here in this country, and I have the chance and opportunity to become successful. Maybe a lot of Hispanics who come here illegally don't feel like they are going to be successful and will probably just end up working in any place that they can find a job. I think that is the reason they tried to bring me down because that is how they feel.

I feel like there are some teachers that are here for me. They believe I can do it. So it is a challenge to try and prove them right. My math teacher is always giving extra work so that I can challenge myself and become more advanced. I feel as if some of the teachers treat Hispanics different because they have low expectations for them. I have had teachers who are really rude during the first couple of days of class to me. They don't think I am serious about school. But after they get to know me, they realize that I am here to work hard. I feel like teachers don't think that I'm capable of getting anywhere in life because I am Latina. There are a high percentage of female Mexicans who end up getting pregnant at a young age. I feel like teachers look at me like I'm one of those girls. It is hard for me to think people look at me like that, but after a teacher really gets to meet me and find out who I really am-and where I want to get in life-they start looking at me different. They get to know me.

I feel like there are teachers who do not care about Hispanics. They show little attention. I feel like their attention is just towards the American students and not me or the other Hispanic students. I have had teachers who don't give any attention towards the entire class. It's hard to feel like you are being excluded because we are seen as aliens. A lot of people look at us different. I don't know why people look at Hispanics that way. I think it is because we come from a different country. In Mexico, there are no expectations. If you don't get anywhere in life, that's just the way it is. If you did good, great for you-if you didn't, oh well. But here in the United States, you have to get somewhere to be someone. In Mexico, you just have to get a job, but here it is different. Being Hispanic sometimes makes me feel like people don't expect the best out of you since we come from different cultures, have different roots, different religion, and come from a different country.

There have been a lot of great teachers. The tutoring center helps me a lot. They've always helped me get all my work done and, if I need help understanding things, they have always been there.

English is difficult for me to understand. It's hard because my Spanish is not amazing and my English is not amazing. I think I'm somewhere in between for both languages. I have some difficulties with big words in the English language. When I am reading, I have to use context clues. I have to read and reread the sentence several times in order for me to understand what big words mean. I have a teacher right now that is very patient. Whenever I come to a word that I don't understand, she is there to help me. Sometimes my writing is not that interesting because I'm not using bigger words that make things sound more mature and interesting. Once I know what a word means, I know how to use it in a sentence. I think I need to really focus on one language and dominate it, and then learn the other one because trying to learn both languages at the same time is hard for me. My English teacher challenges me by having me read and work ahead. She tells me, if there is something I do not understand, I should always ask her.

Right now, I have all of the regular high school courses-I'm not in any advanced classes. I think I would like to stay in regular English class but maybe take a more advanced math class. I do great in science and love biology classes. I think it's easy for me to learn when the subject has to do with numbers, but it's more difficult when I have to read the words. English is where I need help. I speak Spanish at home. My dad knows a little bit of the English language so sometimes I can speak to him in the English language. He is pretty cool with talking English. My mom does not really know the English language, so sometimes when we talk in English, my mom thinks we're talking about her-so she doesn't like when we talk English around her.

I have great parents that always have had high expectations for me, my future-and the same for my siblings. Having them always be on my case is a good thing because it keeps me focused. I'm always trying my best for myself and for them. I have met parents of American people who tell their kids, "You better get a scholarship, do good in life, get good grades." I don't think they believe Mexican parents have the same expectations. I feel like American people think that Mexican parents don't expect anything from their kid's future or life. My parents always care about how well I do in school, and I feel like other people don't think that they do because my parents are always working or they are busy with their businesses.

I think that Hispanics come to America to seek that "American Dream." So, when they come to the United States, they want the best for their children-not for themselves. My mom always tells me that I just came into life and she's almost out. "We are here for you. We came to this country for a better future for you." I



know that is why other Hispanic families come here. They come here for a better future because Mexico does not hold that future for them or their children.

I think one of the main reasons that I am where I am today is because of my parents. There are a lot of Hispanics who have gone the wrong direction, and I could have been one of them if not for my parents. My parents have taken notice of my success. When my parents found out that I was part of this study, they were so proud because they know other Hispanic students who are in the same school that I am that did not get selected. Being a part of something like this really motivates me to keep going because someday I may get recognized again. It is great to have people who are actually looking at you and recognizing your success and hard work.

My main goal is to graduate from high school. I know that there are a lot of Hispanics that drop out of school. I want to graduate and hopefully graduate with a scholarship. I want to help people, so my goal is to become a doctor. I know that I can accomplish my goal if I focus. I'm not sure what kind of doctor I want to become yet, but hopefully I'll know more in the summer after I attend a conference on medical school.

I have had a lot of bumps throughout the way. As an example, there are times when my parents do not think we are going to make it financially-when it comes to paying for college. My relatives have a successful business but they are having problems paying for their son's college. So my parents are worried because they say, "Our relatives should have had the money to pay for their son's college and they're barely making it, how are we going to afford that?" My parents always say that they are not going to allow themselves to be put into a situation where they cannot send their daughter to college. They do not want to say, "My daughter didn't go to college because we didn't have enough money." That lets me know that my parents are here for me. I have put in a lot of hard work into school and I'm sure that they are putting a lot of hard work into making sure we have the money for me to go to college. It makes me feel like my parents have always been there for me, even though they have been very busy. I know that they're going to be a matter for me when it comes for me to go to college. I think my parents expect me to get a scholarship in order to go to college. So, my number one focus right now is to keep my grades high. If I keep my grades high and I get a scholarship, we won't have to go through that major bump when I graduate from high school.

I do have relatives who live here in Colorado. Most of my relatives are business owners who run restaurants. My oldest cousin could not go to college because she did not have papers [documents stating she is a legal immigrant]. I have another cousin who started college and she got pregnant and dropped out. The next cousin that's in line to go to college is 17, and then there are three of us the same age that

are going to graduate high school at the same time. I do not know much about college other than I know there is a lot of homework. It is nothing like high school from what I've heard from other people. I think college is way more than my imagination can go at this time. I transitioned from middle school to high school and found that it was really different in high school compared to middle school. So, I am sure that transitioning from high school to college will be way different too.

I think that the support I have in college is going to be different. When I go to college, I am going to separate from my family depending on where I go. I hope to have a really mature mind and focus because I will have to depend on myself. I think that it's going to be hard for me because my mom and I do not communicate that much, but she has always been there to motivate me. She learned about motivation when she worked at a cell phone company. The company used to have motivation days where they would show videos about how to succeed-not only in the company and also how to succeed in life. The videos taught that you can do anything you want in life. I have been trying to remember everything my mom has told me. I keep what she has told me in my head because it is going to help me someday. I know that it's going to be different without my mom with me in college. She has always been the one that would put a meal on the table and do everything around the house with a little bit of help from my sister and me. I know it's going to be a lot different with me on my own. I will have to do my own laundry, meals, and everything like that. I am going to have to be on my own in school without her to motivate me. I know it's going to be hard for me, but I know that my mother will still be there for me. I think being on my own is going to be a bit messy with all the homework, studying, and work. Right now, my mom teaches my sister and me little things-like how to cook. It's going to be hard to put everything in my schedule so that I get everything that I need done.

My mom actually went to college in Mexico for a year. She was from a small town in Mexico and they had to travel to the big city in order for her to go to college. It was hard for them because they had to travel every weekend to bring her back and forth to school. My grandmother had six kids, and all six of them were going to college at about the same time. My mom made her own decisions and she ended up pregnant after her first year of college. That may have been her one mistake in life. My dad dropped out of school when he was in middle school, possibly even elementary. His parents were farmers. My mother worked at a bank. My parents have very little education. So I think that's why my parent's expectations of me are high. My parents tell me, "Don't get pregnant and do the things you're supposed to do." They keep me from going to parties because they know that I could put myself at risk. At first, I get really irritated because I feel like I deserve to go out. Too much schoolwork gives me headaches. I think, why can't I go out with my friends and why can't I do these things that they do? But then I remember what my mom told me about my aunt who has three kids. She

told me one of my aunt's kids was always reading books, studying, and preparing himself. He was always reading and focusing on his work. The other two were party freaks. My young uncle is now a doctor and the other two are now just beginning to go to college, and they are older than he is. So, I think to myself, if I focus I won't end up like them. I will finish college on time.

I'm not sure where I am going to college. I've been told that, if I stay here in Colorado, tuition would be less expensive. I really do not want to stay in Colorado; I would prefer to go to college in San Diego. My dad told me there is a good college in San Luis Obispo and, if he can, he will take me to that college. I could be the first in my family to graduate from a college in the United States. I would be proud of myself, and when I do graduate from college, I will have a story to tell. That story will start with, "I am a successful Latina."

## **Conclusion**

Each student had a story to tell and much of their story was positive and encouraging, but some parts of their stories were difficult to tell and tough to hear. Maria spoke of her kindergarten teacher who made such an impact on her that she believed she would not have had success without her care and support. The appreciation she had in her for her teacher was evident her voice. Sofia stated she would not be anywhere if not for her parents and their constant watchful eyes. She had a bit of sadness and pain on her face when she describes the incidents of discrimination and racism she had encountered. Socorro lowered his voice when he said, "When people would say things like that it would hurt me." He brightened up when he spoke about being a pilot, traveling, and being a good sales person. Some times, educators only see the assessment data and the work students submit. Many times educators may not see the student and the abilities they possess. Educators need to look deep into the Hispanic student and ask about his or her hopes and dreams. They need to ask the students about their goals, listen to their stories, offer support and encouragement, and not judge students based only on limited

research studies or assessment statistics. All three students in this study had goals and dreams, all wanted to become successful, and all three had a desire to graduate from college and be someone or something in life, and all three had support from teachers, parents, and friends.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This study gave voice to three academically successful Hispanic students of Mexican descent. The students were eager to share their stories of what it was like to be a student. The goal of this research was to tell the stories of three students of Mexican descent who were academically successful, providing the reader a counter-narrative to the more stereotypical deficit view of Hispanic students. Through in-depth interviews, these three students of Mexican descent were given the opportunity to tell their personal stories about what it was like to be a student. In this study, these three Hispanic students tell us about their experiences with education, their support systems, the adversity they faced, and their future goals. Common themes emerged from the students' stories: adversity, college, discrimination friends/peer pressure, language barriers, parent/family support, pride, responsibility, and teacher support

A counter to the more stereotypical deficit view of Hispanic students was the purpose of the study, yet much of what the students stated in their stories is consistent with the literature. Taking the common themes and combining or integrating them can give us a new approach to the literature on what is helpful to improving the academic success of Hispanic students.

## **Social Support**

Most of the teachers that these students had were supportive, able to motivate these students, connect with them and challenge them to do their best. Teacher support was in the form of giving the student challenging work, not helping students. These students believed that they were being supported because their teachers challenged them to do more. The students in this study were strong learners. They each had a desire to learn as much as possible. Their teachers also recognized that these students had a desire to learn and were willing to accept the challenge of doing more to be successful. Teachers were able to gain access that they may not have had if not for the students needing support. If the students would have been able to speak English upon entering school they may not have had the level of support they experienced. The extra support in turn gave them an advantage that they may not have otherwise had. The teachers spent more time with them and in doing so these students were able to utilize their teachers to learn and gain more knowledge. Without that support their experiences and connections may have been much different. They were able to take adversity of not knowing English and were able to gain extra support from their teachers. They all commented on how the teachers they have had were the reason they were at the level that they were. They believed that if not for that support they would not be where they are today. These students had teachers that believed in them and had confidence that they could perform at high levels. The teachers pushed them to get the highest grades that they could and in turn made lasting connections with these students.

These students had a great deal of support from their parents. The support from parents gave them the ability to focus on what was important to educationally. Because of the control their parents had the students did not have to make many of the choices that other students are forced to make. Sofia did not go to parties because her parents did not let her. She did not have to decide if she could go to a party. Her parents made that decision for her. She did not have to deal with peer pressure or find herself in situations that could be harmful to her because her parents prevented her from being in that position. The support Maria and Socorro had from parents telling them to “sit here and do your home work,” took the pressure off of them as to whether they would watch TV, go out, or do their school work. These students were able to focus on academics because the control their parents had.

### **Resiliency**

It was evident from the narratives that all three students were resilient. They were able to take what would normally prevent people from becoming successful and become stronger and more determined. A teacher asks a student “do you understand?” The student does not understand but has learned when a teacher speaks to him or her they are supposed to acknowledge the teacher, so the student nods. The teacher believes that the students is understanding and does not need help so the teacher walks away. There is an issue of communication and it has to do with language barriers. The students could have taken an encounter like this and said they do not care about me. I cannot do this and so I am not going to try. These students asked someone else for help. They did not take the

teachers inability to understand them personally and give up. They were able to use the misunderstanding and gain understanding by using other people.

Having people put one another down because of race or ethnicity is more common than many want to believe. These students had to deal with students that were insensitive, racist, and discriminatory. They took the comments and insinuations and were able to show that they were not the people that the accusers believed they were. They used the negative comments and became more determined to be better than they were.

The students were able to avoid the peer pressure of their peers and friends and do what they believed was in their best interest. Peer pressure among teens is hard to escape. Sofia was able to realize that she did not need to conform to her friends' expectations of missing class or not completing classwork. She was able to take the pressure and work harder and faster so it would appear to others that she was doing what they did in class, socializing with others. Maria took the comments of her peers that asked can you do it and what are you doing as a signal to talk about how well she was doing, "I don't like bragging about myself if they ask me what my grades are or my GPA is. I tell them, but not in the bragging way." Socorro took comments about him not being as smart as other students because he was Mexican and used it to do well on assignments and tests in order to take the work to those students and show them he was as capable of quality work as anybody.

These are all examples of the resiliency that these three students had. The adversity that these students had to endure made them stronger students and people in



general. They all felt a responsibility to achieve success not only for themselves and others but also in spite of those that told them they could not be successful.

### **Creative Tension**

Senge (2006) defines “creative tension” as when there is distance between where a person is, their current reality, and where the person wants to be, their goals. The tension exists when a person is motivated to take action to move from their current reality toward their goals. There is not tension if a person is happy with their current reality because there is no need to be motivated to move. These students had a great deal of creative tension. They all had goals that did not look like their current realities. They all were motivated to take action to move toward their goals. They did not allow others to dictate what their goals would be. They had a focus, the energy to change their current conditions and the motivation from within to become successful. When friend told them that it did not matter if they worked because there was no future Sofia did not allow their complacency to lower her goals. Socorro stated he wanted to have a better life than his parents because he wanted to give his children more than his parents were able to give him. This is not the typical Hispanic student that we hear about. These students wanted more and they were willing to work hard, make sacrifices, and persevere as much as they needed to in order to get what they want.

### **Conclusion**

The students in this study countered the stereotypical norm of Hispanic students that do not graduate from high school. These students have a support system at home and at school. The parents of these students were authoritative in their parenting style, they

had a high level of control and they were very supportive of these students. Many teachers and other people have the viewpoint that Hispanic parents do not have an interest in education. These three students had parents that provided them with a place to study, questioned them about how they were doing in school, and parents that were willing to sit with them and help if they could. These students had conversations at home about grades, classes, college and behavior. Their parents had control over what they able to do outside the home and taught them the importance of hard work and sacrifice in order to achieve their goals. These students listened to their parents and respected them for their support, firmness, and their wisdom.

The adversity that these students had to endure made them stronger students and people in general. They all felt a responsibility to achieve success not only for themselves and others, but sometimes in spite of those that told them they could not be successful. They all had language barriers that could have stopped them from achieving but they had addition support and access to teachers that made them better students. These three students had friends that both challenged them and attempted to bring them down. The students were able to realize that the work they were doing and the lives that they were going to live would be their own and not their friends. They did not allow others to dictate what their goals would be. They had a focus, the energy to change their current conditions and the motivation from within to become successful. Some of their friends and peers were not kind. They told racist jokes, and made statements about their ethnicity and were discriminatory toward the students. Some of the students felt that teachers treated them differently because of their ethnicity. They could have taken a defensive

stance or retaliated against those individuals but instead they worked harder, made connections and demonstrated their abilities through academic successes.

These three students have goals of attending and graduating from college. Even though they do not know much about college, may have a difficult time affording college and being separated from their families they want to better themselves with a college education. Teachers talked to them about college and their parents are doing everything they can to give them the chance to go. They want to be on of the few Hispanic students that graduate from college.

All three students were proud of their ethnicity and proud of their accomplishments. They demonstrated pride in their work, and in their attitude about themselves. They all are proud to be students and they all are successful because they are not willing to be one of the 45% of Hispanic students that do not graduate from high school. They will be successful and they have more to add to their stories and then maybe share their stories with their children and anyone that will listen.

The stories these three students shared have shown that there are Hispanic students that are able to become academically successful. These students attributed their success to the support of teachers, parents, family and friends. The researcher believes that with the combined support from teachers, parents, and others, these students have overcome adversity such as language barriers, people that did not believe they could become successful, and racial and prejudicial biases and used the adversity to gain strength and motivation. By listening to the voices of these three students who are academically successful, the reader is provided with the opportunity to see there are

Hispanic students that are determined to succeed in spite of the stereotypical viewpoint that Hispanic students do not want to be academically successful. Even though there were many people that doubted that these students could be successful, these students repeatedly spoke about the teachers who pushed them not by helping them, but by challenging them and never giving up on them. Their teachers expected and believed these students could succeed. The parents of these three students believed and expected that their children would be successful and used their control as parents to take away many of the pressures that students have and allowed their children the ability to focus on their academics.. Academic success was what was expected from these students and that is what they were able to accomplish.

Educators can read about the struggles and accomplishments these students have shared in their stories and may be inspired to challenge and give more support to their own struggling students. Parents may see what these three students' parents supported their children and may be willing to increase their control in order to support their own children. Students may read about these students and be inspired by the resilience, pride and responsibility of these students had and they may be motivated to change their current reality and set higher goals to become academically successful themselves and achieve what they once thought was unreachable: Hispanic academic success.

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## **Appendix A: Informed Consent Forms**

Title of Research Project: Success Stories of Hispanic Students

Your child is invited to participate in a study of what Hispanic students say it is like to be a student who has achieved success. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy. This study is conducted by Wesley Montoya. Results will be used to complete a dissertation and to receive a grade in the course. Wesley Montoya can be reached at 719 660-3601 or at wesmontoya@msn.com. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. Linda Brookhart, Education Department, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303-871-2973/Linda.Brookhart@du.edu.).

Participation in this study should take about 270 minutes of your child's time. Participation will involve responding to open-ended questions about what Hispanic students say it is like to be a student. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, your child experiences discomfort he/she may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect their right to choose not to answer any questions that may make them feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty.

Your child's responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify them. This is done to protect the confidentiality of their responses. Only the researcher and his advisor will have access to your child's story and individual data. Any narratives generated as a result of this study will not include your child's name. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how your child was treated during the interviews, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records. The researcher will also keep a copy of the signed form for a period of five years. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called Successful Hispanic Student Stories. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to allow my child to participate in this study, and I understand that am able to withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

## **Informed Consent Form (Spanish Version)**

### **Historias del Estudiante Hispano**

#### **Formulario de Consentimiento**

Su hijo es invitado a participar en un estudio sobre lo que los estudiantes dicen que es ser un estudiante. Su participación es voluntaria y no están obligados a contestar preguntas que usted encuentre inadecuadas. Esta entrevista se basa en su decisión de responder libremente y no tienen obligación para responder y puede terminar la entrevista, si se desea.

Esta entrevista se ha diseñado para mí para obtener información acerca de las historias sobre lo que es ser un estudiante. Estas entrevistas fueron parte del desarrollo de un proyecto de tesis de investigación académica sobre los exitosos historias de los estudiantes hispanos.

Si quieres yo te daré una copia de los resultados de este estudio. Su hijo no recibirá pago por su participación en el proyecto.

El investigador a cargo de este proyecto es Wesley Montoya en el Departamento de Educación en la Universidad de Denver, Colorado, EE.UU. Wesley Montoya puede ser contactada por teléfono a 719 660-3601 o por correo electrónico al [wesmontoya@msn.com](mailto:wesmontoya@msn.com). Este proyecto está supervisado por la Dr. Linda Brookhart Departamento de Educación , Universidad de Denver, Colorado, EE.UU. Dr. Brookhart puede ser contactada por teléfono a 1-303-871-2973 o por correo electrónico al [Linda.Brookhart@du.edu](mailto:Linda.Brookhart@du.edu) .

Esta forma se asegura la confidencialidad de la entrevista. Su nombre no será utilizado en cualquier material escrito, a menos que usted dé su permiso. Esto incluye los resultados finales y las conclusiones de este estudio. Los materiales de esta entrevista se mantendrá en un lugar seguro en el archivo seguro de los investigadores y sólo el supervisor e investigador tendrá acceso.

Hay dos excepciones a la confidencialidad de esta entrevista: Aunque las preguntas no están dirigidas a obtener información ajena al proyecto, si la información revela hechos de suicidio, homicidio, o abuso y negligencia de niños, es requerido por la ley que sea divulgado a las autoridades. Además, si cualquier información contenida en este estudio incluye una orden judicial o una citación legal, la Universidad de Denver no puede evitar conformidad con esa orden o citación.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta o quejas sobre cómo le trataron durante esta entrevista, puede contactarse con Dr. Susan Sadler, Director del Comité para la Protección de los Derechos de Sujetos que Participan en Proyectos de Investigación (o IRB por sus siglas en Inglés) de la Universidad de Denver, al teléfono 1-303-871-3454 o a la dirección de correo electrónico [ssadler@du.edu](mailto:ssadler@du.edu), o la Sra. Sylk Sotto-Santiago, al teléfono 1-(303) 871-4052 o a la dirección de de correo electrónico [Sylk.Sotto-Santiago@du.edu](mailto:Sylk.Sotto-Santiago@du.edu). Usted también puede contactarse por carta a la Universidad de

Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

***Este formulario de consentimiento fue aprobado por el University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research en.***

Por favor, firme si usted entiende y acepta que su hijo participe en este proyecto.

He leído y comprendido la descripción de la entrevista asociadas a la investigación de los estudiantes hispanos. Me pidió y recibió una explicación satisfactoria si se hizo la pregunta en un idioma no se entiende completamente. Estoy de acuerdo en que permita que el niño y para participar en este estudio y entiendo que puedo retirar mi consentimiento en cualquier momento. He recibido una copia de este formulario de consentimiento.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Número de teléfono/e-mail

\_\_\_\_\_ Entiendo que mi nombre del niño no será utilizado en este estudio.

Permiso para ser audio grabado para este estudio. Entiendo que todas las entrevistas se registraron en este estudio y se mantendrá en un lugar seguro en el archivo seguro de los investigadores y no será utilizada por personas ajenas al equipo de investigación.

\_\_\_\_\_ Doy permiso para ser grabado en audio.

\_\_\_\_\_ No doy permiso para ser grabado en audio.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

Research Question: What are the personal and academic stories of academically successful Hispanic urban high school students?

### **First Interview**

Introduce the project and tell the student what to expect.

Opening question. I am interested in hearing what it is like to be a Hispanic student in school, Tell me what school is like and what brought you to the point you are at today.

From the resulting narratives look for effects and ask follow up questions, related to factors that contributed to their academic success.

Ask about key points from the student, for example, *you mentioned that you were supported by a teacher/parent. I am trying to learn more about how teachers and parents helped students with their academic success Tell me a little about that. What did they do to help you?*

As time allows, ask for examples or stories, feelings about or reactions to the experience, and changes the participant brought.

At the end of the interview, explain that next time you will explore some of these areas more deeply. Ask the student to make a note of anything that comes up in the time between the interviews that might be of interest.

### **Second Interview Guide**

Give the student an opportunity to return to what he/she talked about in the first session and explore the experience in greater depth.



Ask, *Was there anything that we talked about last time that was particularly meaningful to you?*

Encourage additional disclosure and stories by guiding the student to topics that may have been introduced but not fully considered in first interview. Ex. You stated... (possible topics could be language barriers, no place o study, peer pressures etc.) how did you overcome those to become academically successful?

Ask, *What do you think I should ask in these interviews? If the topic was not covered, do so now.*

Ask, *Because your interviews have covered a lot of territory, not all of it can be included in my report. What would you be disappointed to see left out?*

### **Narrator Check Session**

Ask the student to review the narrative you created for accuracy and completeness: *This is how I interpreted what you have shared with me in the previous session. Did I get it right? What needs to be fixed? Clarified? Deleted?*

Ask, *Do you see anything in the narrative that surprises you?*

Ask, *Did the narrative I constructed using your words remind you of anything you would like to add?*

Ask, *How do you feel about being asked to tell your story of being a student?*

Adapted from Mears, C. (2009). Interviewing for education and social science research: The gateway approach.

### **Appendix C: Interview Summary Form**

Analysis of what do Mexican students say it is like to be a student.

Student Ref. Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Main patterns and themes that became apparent during the interview.
2. Information that relates to the research question(s).
3. Particularly significant stories on back.

Question Information

Mears, C. (2009). Interviewing for education and social science research: The gateway approach. Used by permission.

## Appendix D: Data Analysis Organizer

Adapted from Mears, C. (2009). Interviewing for education and social science research: The gateway approach.

Narrators			
Themes Or Patterns	Narrator 1	Narrator 2	Narrator 3
Theme 1			
Theme 2			
Theme 3			
Theme 4			
Theme 5			

## Appendix E: District/Principal's Site Consent Form

Dear District /Building Principal \_\_\_\_\_,

As the number of Hispanic students increase in schools, it is important to assess what Hispanic students say is aiding in their academic achievement. On behalf of the University of Denver, I would like to ask your permission to conduct a research study that involves Hispanic students in your school. The focus of this study is to tell the stories of three successful Hispanic students to provide a counter narrative of the deficit view of Hispanic students.

With your permission, the students who agree to participate in this study will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in three 90 minute interviews. These interviews will be audio taped.
2. Answer a series of open-ended questions regarding their experience as students in public schools.
3. Within a week to ten days following the interviews, review the typed transcription of the interview to verify accuracy and/or suggest items for clarification, to be changed or deleted.
4. Total time—approximately 270 minutes or about three 90 minute interviews.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints with this research, feel free to contact me at (719) 660-3601. If you, would like to speak with someone other than me, you may contact Dr. Linda Brookhart, Education Department, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303-871-2973/ email [Linda.Brookhart@du.edu](mailto:Linda.Brookhart@du.edu) or the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
Sincerely,

---

Mr. Wesley Montoya  
Researcher, University of Denver  
(719) 660-3601  
[wesmontoya@msn.com](mailto:wesmontoya@msn.com)

**Appendix F: Request to Conduct Academic Research in School District A**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number and good times to call: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax number: \_\_\_\_\_

Study Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Funding Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The following information can either be provided on this sheet or through an attached document.**

Brief description of study purpose and rationale: \_\_\_\_\_

Research questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Scope and timeline of study: \_\_\_\_\_

What are you requesting from District A (e.g., permission to administer a 30 minute interview three students

anytime during the school year)? \_\_\_\_\_

Data collection timeline: \_\_\_\_\_

Instruments (attach copies of surveys, instructions, consent forms, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated benefit to District A: \_\_\_\_\_

*School District A*

*Colorado Springs, CO*