

# In Search of Opportunity

Latino Men's Paths to Post-Secondary Education in Urban Massachusetts



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The Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee, was established in Mr. Balfour's will of 1973, which directed the bank to sell the company he founded and ran in Attleboro, Massachusetts, and to take the proceeds to create a foundation that would focus on supports for his former employees and their children and grandchildren; human service and medical needs in the town of Attleboro; and education. Within the education area, the Balfour Foundation focuses on supporting higher education attainment for underserved and underrepresented populations. The Foundation makes grants throughout New England.

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# Foreword

**R**arely do studies look to the voices of youth to confront the struggles they face. This report proves tremendously valuable in countering that trend. It offers a critique of public education from the perspective of young Latino males as they reflect upon their own experiences and perceptions—and struggles—with their educational trajectories. Combined with quantitative data, this report reveals the challenges that Latino males in urban Massachusetts face in pursuit of education and of their imagined futures. Through their voices, for example, this report offers insight into doubts about the return on investing their time and money into higher education, a trend that speaks to widespread wage stagnation in the United States. By listening to their stories, it becomes clear also that Latino men who make it to college typically lack the support necessary to successfully balance the demands of work, school, and family.

But before considering why Latino males in urban Massachusetts have difficulty completing college once they are enrolled or why they might opt out of pursuing a college degree in the first place, this report suggests that we direct our attention to the early education experiences of Latino males. One finding this report highlights, for example, is that in the third grade, students' educational paths begin to diverge—a divergence that compounds with each passing year. Without early intervention, there will be little hope to increase the chances for Latino males in urban Massachusetts to obtain four-year college degrees. In a climate where the college persistence and graduation rates for these men are abysmal and increasingly under threat, the importance of early intervention cannot be overstated.

This report has made it abundantly clear that increased efforts to improve the pathways to college for Latino males in urban Massachusetts cannot start soon enough. Given the prevalent notion that investing in a college education is worth neither the time nor the money—a perception that extends far beyond Latino males and the state of Massachusetts—it is imperative to work with parents in deeper ways to help them increase their knowledge and know-how of higher education and pave appropriate pathways to college for their children.

But educating families is not enough. Other local-level actors—community based organizations in particular—need to be strengthened and become more invested in education systems and reforms. Furthermore, it is necessary to look more closely at local social structures in their unique complexity. The diversity within the “Latino experience” on the one hand, and among the specific economic, political, and sociocultural climates in each of the five different urban areas in this study on the other, do not lend themselves to simple policy fixes. Rather, while this report shows how young Latino men in five Massachusetts cities are navigating the education pathways currently before them, it astutely recommends more investigative work needs to be undertaken to understand the specific ecologies of local policy makers, schools, parents, community-based organizations, etc. in each of these urban areas.

By capturing the stories of Latino men through their unique voices, this report is bound to prompt numerous provocative discussions, blazing a trail for more studies taking a similar approach. With some hope, it will help to raise more nuanced questions and to develop better solutions to the many challenges Latino men in urban Massachusetts face, both in their daily lives and on their educational pathways.

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Major Findings</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Major Findings Elaborated</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Community Profiles</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Boston</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Holyoke</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Lawrence</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Springfield</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Worcester</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Family</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>Institutions</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Peers</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Reflections from Campus</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>87</b>
<b>Appendix: Methodology</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>Appendix: Technical</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	<b>105</b>



# Preface

**T**he Latino population in Massachusetts is growing rapidly. In fact, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, the Commonwealth is one of six states in the United States that can attribute all of its population growth between 2000 and 2010 to the increase in its Latino population. At the same time, the Massachusetts economy is driven by sectors such as biotechnology that require a skilled and educated workforce, with a significant share of new jobs requiring at least an associate's degree. These parallel trends mean that it is critical that the Latino population of Massachusetts participate in post-secondary education at high rates, and that Latinos and Latinas successfully complete post-secondary degrees. However, as noted in *Getting Closer to the Finish Line*, a 2013 report commissioned by the Boston Foundation, Latino students are the least likely to enroll in and complete post-secondary programs, with young Latino males showing the lowest levels of post-secondary success. This has profound and distressing implications for the Commonwealth.

Both the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation and the Boston Foundation have long histories of focusing on post-secondary success for under-served and under-represented populations. The longitudinal data on post-secondary credential attainment for Boston Public Schools has revealed substantial gaps in completion for young Latino men. But while the data showed us what was happening, it gave us very little insight into why it was happening. We could find virtually no research in which the young men themselves were asked to tell their stories, to explain their rationale for choosing to enroll (or not) in higher education, and to identify the factors that helped or hindered their quest to attain credentials. Without understanding the motivations, challenges, and stories of these young men, it seems likely that policy and program approaches to increasing young Latino male engagement in higher education would fail or fall short of the mark.

This report is an important first step in hearing the voices of these young men. As funders, we thought it was critical to ask the young men directly and to let their narratives shape the recommendations for policy and program responses that foster post-secondary success. We have learned a great deal from the findings and hope that our fellow funders and other stakeholders will listen to what they have to say. We thank the Latino Education Institute of Worcester State University for their tireless work on this project, and look forward to engaging with the broader community as we continue to address this issue.

The Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation,  
Bank of America, N.A., Trustee

The Boston Foundation





# Executive Summary

**T**his report focuses on three questions: 1) What are the college readiness and completion experiences of young Latino men in urban Massachusetts; 2) What helps or prevents young Latino men from successfully obtaining a post-secondary credential; and 3) What influences young Latino men's decision-making processes about education and work? These questions derived from a reading of existing literature, much of which tends to draw on quantitative findings.<sup>1</sup> To answer these questions, researchers for this study took a largely qualitative approach to understand the education trajectory of young Latino men through the conceptual framework of the educational pipeline, a continuum of institutions spanning early education to post-secondary education through which students travel. By asking young Latino men, first-hand, about their experiences moving through the pipeline, this project was able to capture their voices and perspectives, providing insight into their educational, work, and personal lives. Accordingly, researchers fused quantitative data with these qualitative findings (personal narratives from the young men) to arrive at a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the discouraging statistics detailing Latino male educational experiences and college completion in Massachusetts.

Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester were selected as research sites because they are home to some of the highest numbers of young Latinos who are struggling educationally and economically. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Latinos made up 9.6% of the overall Massachusetts population, but between 17.5% and 73.8% of the population in the five urban areas under consideration here: Boston (17.5%), Holyoke (48.4%), Lawrence (73.8%), Springfield (38.8%), and Worcester (20.9%).<sup>2</sup> In 2013–2014, 42.4% of all Latino males in Massachusetts public schools were in these five cities.<sup>3</sup> In Massachusetts overall and in these five urban areas, Latinos lag behind

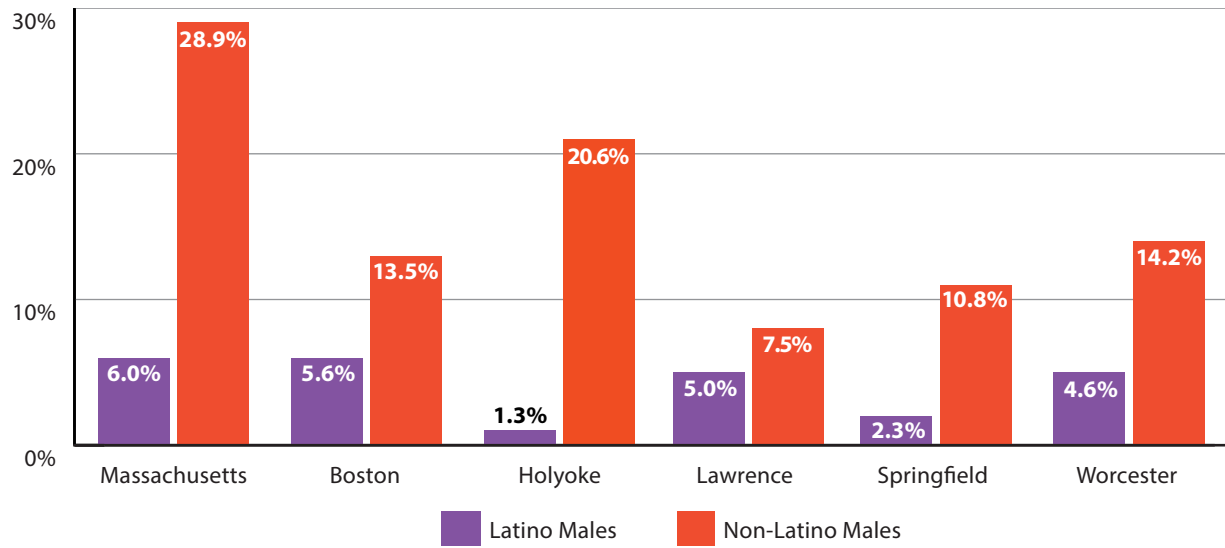
in educational achievement, notably in terms of college completion. As shown in **Figure 1**, of all Latino males who enrolled in Massachusetts public schools in ninth grade, only 6.0% went on to graduate from high school and earn four-year college degrees.<sup>4</sup> For each of the study areas, the number is even lower, with only 1.3% in Holyoke and 2.3% in Springfield.<sup>5</sup> This is an especially acute problem in these five communities because the numbers of Latino students are so high, as seen in **Figure 2**.

Further, the school districts in these areas also experience unique challenges with performance. Thirty-three out of the 39 schools in Massachusetts designated as Level 4 or 5, the most serious levels in the state's accountability system for low performance, are in these five school districts.<sup>6</sup> The Latino students in these districts attend schools with particularly low outcomes. **Figure 3** shows that Latino males attend schools where a substantially small proportion of students reach 10th grade competency on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS, exam (scoring Proficient or higher on English language arts (ELA) and math) and graduate from high school in four years.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, population demographics in these five areas make Latino educational outcomes of high importance for the economic well-being of the cities as well as the individuals. The Latino population in the five cities skews very young with over 72% of Latino males younger than 40 years old. The proportion of the population identifying as Latino is highest among ages 0–17 and declines for older ages.<sup>8</sup> This implies that as the population ages, Latinos will be an increasingly large portion of the adult population in these areas. Therefore, the educational attainment of these young men and their skills as employees are of increasing importance to the economic health of these cities.

FIGURE 1

### 4-Year College Completion



Source: Data Source: MA DESE SIMS, male Latino students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in the 2003-04 through 2004-05.

(For a fuller treatment of these five communities, see the “Community Profiles” section.)

Understanding why young Latino men make the decisions they do helps us understand these disparities, and suggests what additional research needs to be done. Yet, this information is difficult to obtain.<sup>9</sup> As recently as 2014, in a report on men of color in community colleges, Laura Rendón recognized as much: “Black and Latino males are among the least understood community college students. Most educators are aware that, overall, women are doing better than men . . . but few understand the reasons behind these gender inequities and, most important, what to do about this perplexing issue.”<sup>10</sup>

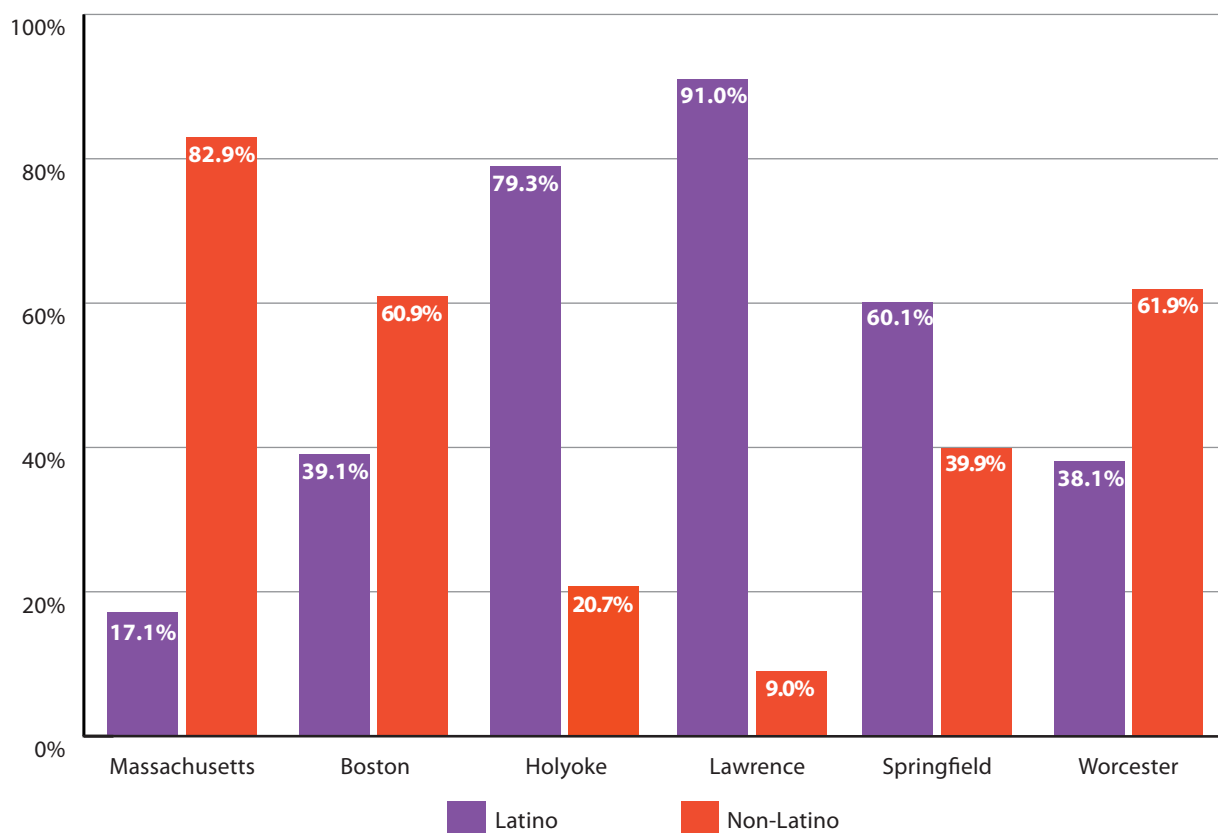
While this project focuses on Latino males, it is important to note that the term *Latino* encompasses a diverse group of people with many cultural heritages, backgrounds, and differences. Due to limitations of our data sources, we cannot comment on how outcomes differ across the wide array of birthplaces and heritages within the Latino population. We document the differences in municipality

demographics in the “Community Profiles.” Additionally, since the project focuses broadly on Latino men, the qualitative findings do not have the sample size to draw conclusions about specific subgroups of males within the Latino diaspora.

Likewise, we recognize that not all Latino men in urban Massachusetts share the same expectations, experiences, and outcomes around higher education. However, early on in our research in these five cities, we heard far more stories of struggle than stories of success around men’s pathways to higher education. We also heard a variety of understandings about what *higher education* actually means. For some, *college* refers only to the completion of a four-year baccalaureate degree, yet for others it refers to any type of education perceived to be “higher” than high school, whether it be courses taken in vocational schools, community colleges, or four-year institutions. This discrepancy leads to tremendous confusion in families, the job market, government institutions, academia, and K–12 schools, and that is reflected in the young men’s narratives.

FIGURE 2

### Ethnicity in Public Schools



Source: MA DESE SIMS data, 2013-14 school year.

Note: Includes male and female students.

English language proficiency and immigrant status are two other important characteristics necessary to consider in a study of this population. Latino male English language learners (ELL) and Latino male immigrants face similar barriers overall and along with the additional difficulties of learning English and adapting to a new country. Across the Commonwealth, ELL students are expected to learn academic level English and content knowledge at the same time with varying degrees of support. Immigrant students and families can face issues related to legal status and the challenges of adapting to a new culture and school system. These groups of students often have lower academic outcomes relative to Latinos overall in the five urban areas of this study as shown by the lower high school graduation and Scholastic

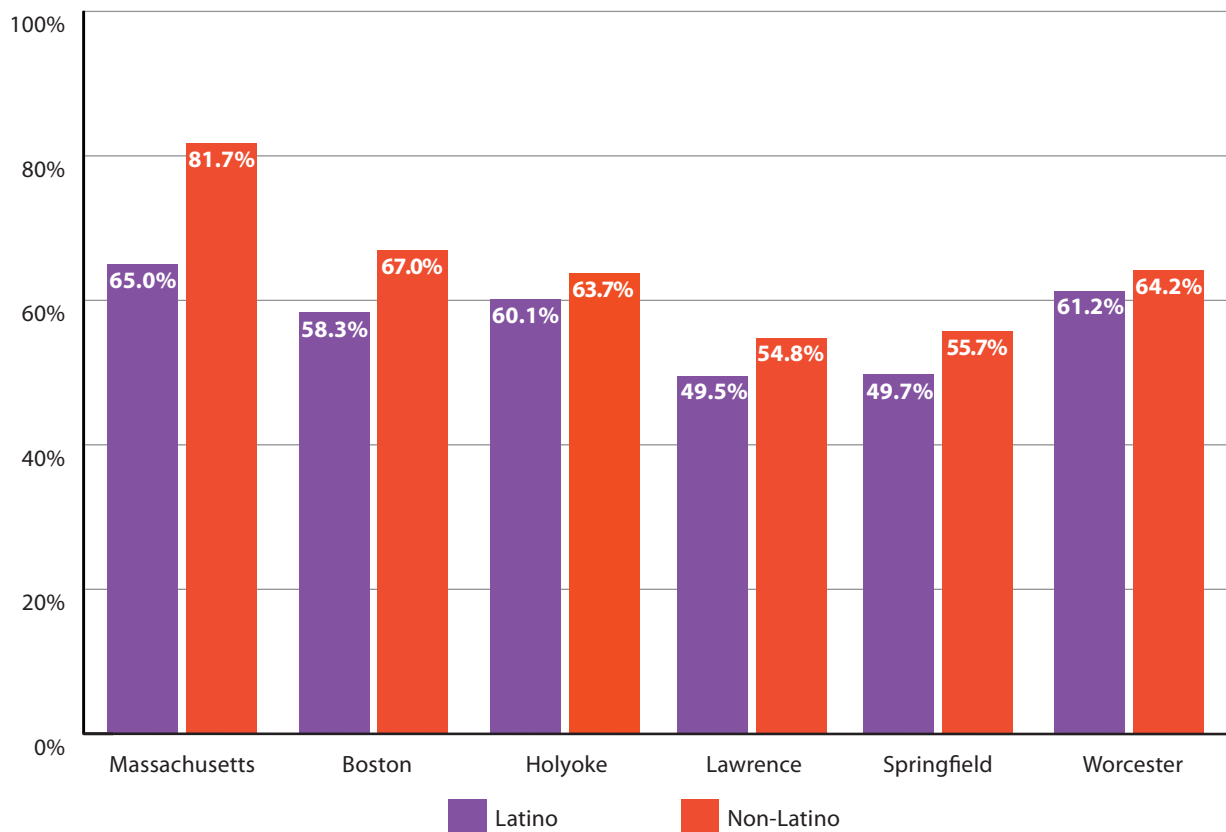
Aptitude Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement (AP) test taking rates in **Figure 4**. This research recognizes achievement gaps between young Latino males and non-Latino males, acknowledging that the outcomes of male Latino ELL and immigrant students are similarly, if not more, concerning.

For this multi-sited study in Massachusetts, then, understanding the reasons why young Latino men experience low educational attainment required researchers to engage them in discussions about their lives and early aspirations on a variety of methodological fronts.<sup>11</sup> First, the quantitative researcher provided detailed descriptive analyses on the five communities. The qualitative research team then devised a multi-faceted and ethnographic approach that included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys with Latino

FIGURE 3A

## High School Outcomes in the Schools of Latino and Non-Latino Males

### 10TH GRADE MCAS COMPETENCY



Source: MA DESE SIMS and MCAS data. The graph depicts the average 10th grade MCAS competency rate in the school of Latino and non-Latino males for 10th graders in 2014. Alternative, collaborative, and special education schools and schools with fewer than 25 students in 10th grade are excluded.

young men and families in all five research sites. Of particular concern among the qualitative research team from the project's inception were two methodological challenges:

- How to address, qualitatively, the monolithic category of "young Latino men" when many men who fit the definition of "Latino" often self-identify with a specific place of origin outside the continental United States (e.g., "Dominican," "Puerto Rican," "Guatemalan," etc.) or with another term.<sup>12</sup>
- How to structure the research to reflect important subgroups within the broad category of Latino, including documented

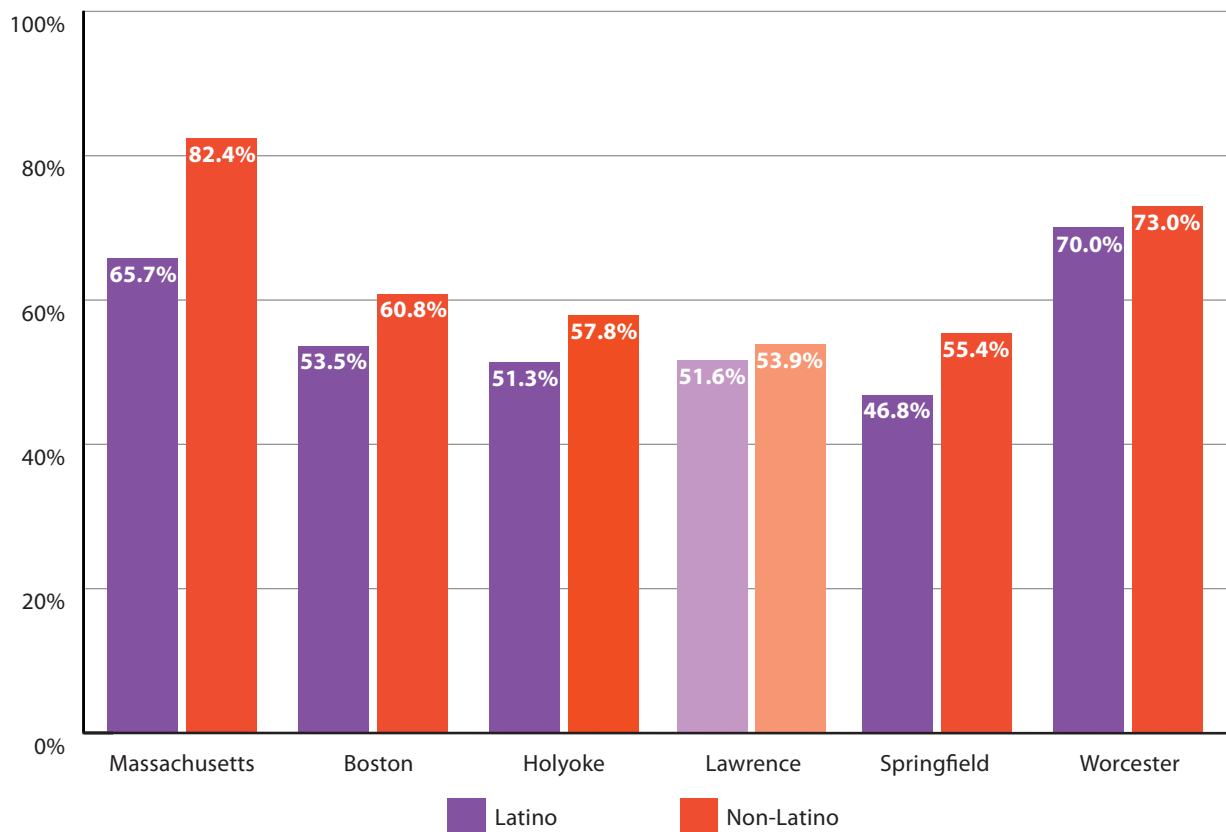
and undocumented immigrants, English language learners, and ancestry. Special care was also taken in the research design to collect narratives from youth with multiple education trajectories including high school completers and non-completers and college graduates and non-graduates.

In order to confront the first problem, using *Latino* for men who may not primarily identify as such, the team asked participants of focus groups and interviews to fill out anonymous intake forms identifying their ethnicity/nationality. In discussions with participants from that moment forward, the team refrained as much as possible from using identity terms for ethnicity/nationality (e.g.,

FIGURE 3B

## High School Outcomes in the Schools of Latino and Non-Latino Males

### 4-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



Source: MA DESE SIMS and MCAS data. The graph depicts the average high school graduation rate in the school of Latino and non-Latino males for those who entered 9th grade in 2011. Alternative, collaborative, and special education schools and schools with fewer than 25 students in 10th grade are excluded.

Note: Faded colors signify no significant difference between Latino and non-Latino populations.

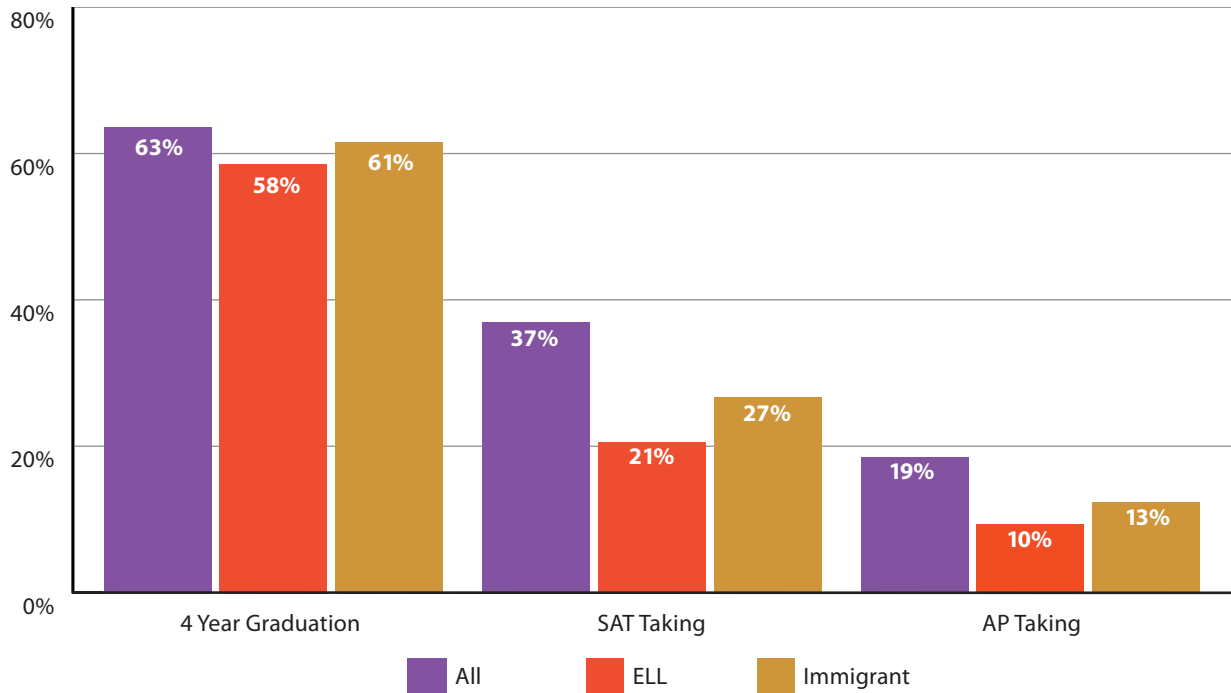
*Latino, Puerto Rican, Dominican, etc.)* unless the men themselves used these terms. The team’s rationale behind this approach was twofold: 1) to avoid framing the discussions in a particular way that might influence the data; and 2) to ensure that the men would share stories about themselves rather than generalizations about “Latinos in Massachusetts.” The consensus among the team members was that this approach would yield more authentic stories about the men’s individual pathways.<sup>13</sup>

To confront the challenge of studying a variety of Latino men of different ethnic/national backgrounds in five different cities, the team established relationships with community-based organizations

(CBOs) serving a broad array of Latino youth to assist with recruiting youth and parents for the focus groups. Further, the project engaged with local community-based media outlets to film youth expressing personal narratives without the research team involvement in an effort to collect stories from young men to identify circumstances, challenges, and opportunities that cut across these five different urban areas. The report assesses the educational pathways of a group of men who, despite their different ethnic/national identifications and locations in Massachusetts, have a number of shared experiences, especially with the process of education.

FIGURE 4

### Outcomes of Latino Males: Overall, ELLs, and Immigrants



Source: MA DESE SIMS data for 2012-13 school year for students in the five urban areas. High school graduation based on those enrolled in the 9th grade in Massachusetts public schools in 2009-10 and projected to graduate in 2012-13. SAT and AP taking reported for students in the 12th grade in 2012-13.

The team conducted two focus groups per site (composed of four to 10 participants each) and eight to 10 one-on-one interviews per site. While this method would not provide sufficient data to characterize, for example, the differences between Latinos in one city vs. another, much less, say, Guatemalans in Boston vs. Puerto Ricans in Holyoke, it *would* be able to identify trends across different groups of Latinos in the five different cities by listening to and taking seriously the voices of young Latino men. Accordingly, the team took a multi-sited approach to this study rather than a comparative one.

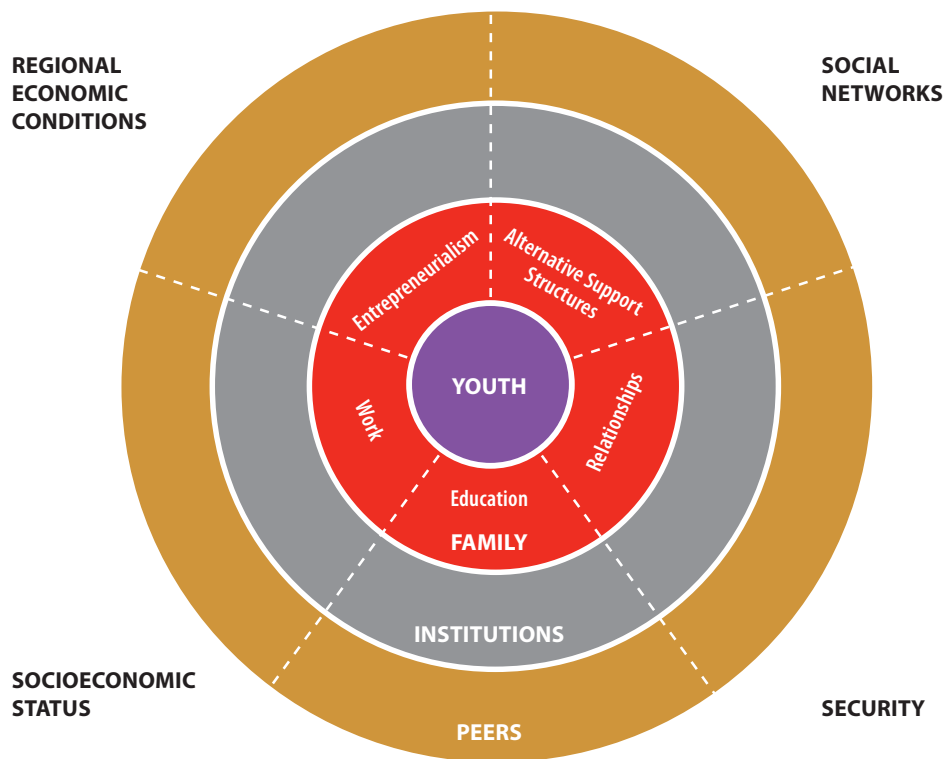
In addition to engaging the young men in focus groups and interviews, researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with Latino families in Worcester and Holyoke to learn more about their perspectives on the experiences of the young men. The qualitative team also used

specialty-commissioned films made by and about cohorts of young Latino men in Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester. These films, shot and edited in the absence of the research team, involved the young men narrating their lives and futures in terms of education, which provided a less formal glimpse into their lives. Finally, researchers combined quantitative data with qualitative findings, producing a deeper understanding of the many obstacles blocking educational and economic success for young Latino men in urban Massachusetts. (For more on methods, see the appendix on methodology.)

**Figure 5** illustrates the framework developed to analyze and describe how external forces (poverty, instability, depressed communities, the conditions of local schools, and poor social networks) and domains (family, institutions, and peers) create a challenging environment for Latino youth,

FIGURE 5

## Latino Male Research Conceptual Framework: External Factors Affecting Youth Education Outcomes and Strategies for Success



particularly for young men. As they navigate these waters, and depending on their circumstances, they pursue different pathways, ranging from higher education to alternative support structures (CBOs, religion, military), work, entrepreneurship, and relationships.

### Major Findings

- Many Latino youth do not view higher education as a prerequisite to achieving their aspirations. Nor do many distinguish among different forms of post-secondary education (i.e., four years equating to a bachelor’s degree, two years equating to an associate’s degree, post-secondary vocational programs, etc.)
- Many parents and students express an aversion to debt, see higher education as out of reach, and lack networks and knowledge that would facilitate access to college and earning a degree.
- Early negative labeling and tracking, difficulty in rebounding from poor standardized test scores, lack of academic/career advising, and poor rapport with teachers bore a significant impact on youth’s ability to achieve educational and professional success.
- Middle school proved a defining period for youth, a crossroad for identity formation and, therefore, a critical time for formulating future goals, including discussions of academic planning, extracurricular activities, and social networks necessary to achieve these goals.
- CBOs provide important assistance for college-bound students unable to access other forms of guidance at home or school AND are often the last best hope for out-of-school youth.

- Latino communities simultaneously encounter multiple stressors including poverty, instability, access to ESL, immigration status, poor social networks, and poor performing schools, all of which negatively impacts educational opportunities and outcomes.
- Youth received inspiration from family, mentors, religion, teachers, and peers and assistance from increased family income, stability, strong schools and neighborhoods, and CBOs.
- Latino college students struggle with balancing the necessity of work and their studies, campus socialization, and academic preparedness due to a number of reasons including the facts that college environments are more regularly designed for traditional students; that Latino young men are often breadwinners in their households and may have family responsibilities; and that peer influence can be a formidable obstacle.

## Major Findings Elaborated

Three dominant domains of life emerged from the qualitative data and were supported frequently by the quantitative data: family, institutions, and peers. Accordingly, the body of the report explores the education trajectory of young Latino males, from elementary school to young adulthood, through the prism of each domain. Naturally, there is overlap between the concepts of each domain, these overlapping areas are highlighted in the report. What follows are major findings separated by domain. For recommendations corresponding to these findings, see “Recommendations” section.

### Family

Family life bore a significant impact on the education trajectory of young adults in this study. Three important themes emerged from the perspectives of youth interviewed: the struggle for economic and social stability, the importance of strong family cohesion, and the negative consequences associated with economically and socially limited

networks.<sup>14</sup> These three themes weighed heavily in young men’s narratives about family life.

- Multiple stressors (e.g., low English-language proficiency, poverty, poor housing conditions, under-employment, high mobility, and trauma) negatively affect school attendance, students’ ability to focus, employment opportunities, and hope for academic advancement.
- Absence of family attachment can pose challenges to young men. Some positive solutions come in the form of surrogate or supplemental family structures (the military, religion, and CBOs). Some negative outcomes reported were poor foster home placement, too much freedom, gang involvement, acting out in school, and engaging in criminal activity.
- The young men report positive associations with strong family support in the form of extended family structures (e.g., grandparents, neighbors), strong male role models and strong family bonds.
- Familial bonds at times unintentionally pose challenges for young men, such as work expectations that challenge college success.
- Parents want their children’s lives to be better than their own but many lack important information about education systems (e.g., ways to help their children succeed in K–12, college costs and funding, college admission and financial aid application processes) and the job market. Parents lacking this information relied on general supportive messages to youth and did not actively participate in college or career planning.
- Living in poor and deindustrialized communities challenges the notion that higher education could transform lives (e.g., college educated youth working in low paying jobs in Holyoke and Springfield; poverty means focusing on immediate needs; investing in college seems financially unwise; and going to college delays wage-earning).



## Institutions

Institutions have a dramatic impact on the way youth see, experience, and act in the worlds in which they live. Importantly, these are locations through which pathways of future success run. The section on institutions explores how young Latino men in the five research sites relate to the institutions—most notably educational institutions (schools) and to a lesser degree community-based organizations (CBOs)—in which they learn and attempt to get ahead.

- Young men’s perspectives on their futures change with age (e.g., dreams of students in elementary school differed from dreams in later grades), and their dreams in high school become compromised in the face of pathways they perceived to be open/closed to them.
- The biggest hurdles to college and occupational success for young Latino men come well *before* college. Latino males are less likely than their non-Latino peers to overcome these hurdles, for example, taking the SAT, meeting high school graduation requirements on the 10th grade MCAS, and graduating from high school.
- Young men express that they lack the knowledge to apply for and the know-how to succeed in college.
- Stories show that men often feel a sense of resignation about their lot in life and their future possibilities due to a lack of investment of schools, family, and/or peers.
- Other stories show that young Latino men were entrepreneurial with high aspirations about starting businesses or inventing products; often higher education was not part of these accounts and youth identified the Internet and open sources of knowledge as the font of information required to reach success.
- Men expressed interest in sometimes positive and sometimes negative social activities (hanging out with friends, gaming, playing sports, having relationships with girls, skipping school, stealing, selling and using drugs) rather

than academics—especially beginning in middle school.

- Men expressed an increasing lack of connection with school staff. For example, in the transition from elementary to middle school, students no longer have one teacher looking after them, but instead, a host of different teachers and, therefore, they are not kept accountable as much as in earlier grades.
- Ethnicity of faculty and administration of schools is not reflective of their student bodies.
- In a context in which being cool was often equated with making trouble, men expressed a desire for better quality classroom dynamics and contact with teachers; if student-teacher relations are improved and students feel a sense of belonging in educational institutions, they believe they would be better students.
- Gay-identified men conveyed how homophobia in school (e.g., discrimination and bullying by fellow students) negatively affected their academic performance.
- Men pointed out how bad decisions and poor performance on standardized tests made early in school led to being labeled, which was difficult to undo. Once labeled as bad kids/troublemakers/underachievers, this stigma shaped how others saw them and how they saw themselves, impeding their progress along educational pathways.
- The narratives of the young Latino men and the statistical analysis suggest that those who score below Proficient on MCAS in earlier grades will be less likely than their peers to score above Proficient in 10th grade, controlling for observable factors. The correlation between early MCAS performance and scoring Proficient in 10th grade progressively grows in higher grades. The findings also show that Latino males are less likely than non-Latino males to improve their academic performance after a low MCAS score in early grades.

## Peers

Like families and institutions, peers exert tremendous influence on the way people perceive the world, weigh information, make decisions, and act on those decisions. The men's stories exemplify how peer groups have the potential to aid as much as derail a person's life, particularly when no other apparent forces are at work to help guide that person in the direction of a productive future.

- Men reported that peer groups shifted significantly in middle school, particularly in terms of peer pressure. Being cool in front of peers became a priority and significantly influenced decision making, sometimes involved engaging in risky and deviant behavior, and was linked to proving one's masculinity or "machismo."
- Peers were characterized as positive influences in terms of academic and emotional health, finding one's way to college, providing support in the absence of family, and helping them through difficult times.
- A lack of positive adult presences in young men's lives influenced their decision making and led to finding the "wrong" group of friends, which compounded poor decision making.
- Men cited the need for role models, mentors, father figures, and community centers to help keep them on a positive and productive path.
- Mobility (in terms of moving from school to school) and transience (in terms of moving from school system to school system) made developing peer groups and the ability to critically assess the "right" group to spend time with difficult.

## A Young Man's Story:

### A Sense of Purpose Through Family – Jorge, Worcester

*Jorge was born in 1990 in Boston to hardworking parents who had emigrated from El Salvador. His earliest memories take place in Worcester, as his parents relocated their family there when Jorge was an infant. His parents have been housekeepers ever since their arrival in the United States. He explains that his parents worked hard in the hopes that their children would be able to have a better life and more job opportunities than they had. Besides instilling a good work ethic in him, Jorge's parents also taught their children not to be followers and to be true to themselves, and they exemplified grace in quiet humility. Jorge sees these values as having greatly contributed to his own success.*

*Jorge's recollection of attending public elementary school is vague, but he remembers having played a lot and enjoying himself. His middle school experience was wasn't as easy. Challenges he cites are: going through puberty; exposure to gangs and drugs; and being picked on and not knowing how to defend himself. In high school everything changed. Just before Jorge began freshman year, his parents purchased a home in a different neighborhood in Worcester, thereby changing his school district. For the first time in his life, Jorge was no longer surrounded by a significant number of Latino students. Attending this new public high school and making friends proved challenging. As one of the only Latinos in his class, he felt out of place and found it difficult to make friends. He maintained his friendships with people from his previous school and neighborhood as he had more in common with them than the students at his new school. But what Jorge liked best about his new school were the after school programs that facilitated moving in the direction of a more positive future. Leadership programs and college readiness programs for Latino students and children of immigrants like him who would be the first generation in their families to go to college eventually made him feel like he belonged there. Though at first Jorge recalls some teachers and counselors doubting his academic abilities because he is Latino, he eventually proved them wrong, and one in particular began to spread the word to other teachers what a good student he was.*

*Jorge graduated from high school with hopes of attending Suffolk University in Boston. Although he was accepted, his family lacked the resources to send him there. Therefore, he attended community college in Worcester until transferring to Worcester State University where he eventually majored in business administration. Upon graduating from college, Jorge began working as a supervisor at a factory and then later as a recruiter in sales. Jorge quickly discovered through both jobs that what he loved best about business—interacting with others—was a much smaller percentage of the work than he had imagined. Jorge switched jobs and became an education advisor at a high school in Worcester, where he still works today. There, his job is to educate high school seniors about the college process. Jorge says he loves his job because he identifies with the students—many of whom, like him, will be the first in their families to go to college—and feels he can positively influence and help them on their paths to college.*



# Community Profiles

**T**he communities in this study include Massachusetts' largest urban areas and are spread over the state's geography. There are natural similarities among the communities, of course, owing to a shared state history. But there are also important regional and municipal differences among them in their demographics, histories,

economies, institutions, and politics. The result is five individual urban areas that in some ways look alike but nevertheless have important differences to consider when reviewing the findings in this report. Recognizing some of the major similarities and differences among these areas at the outset, then, is critical for the study that follows.

FIGURE 6

## The Study Area: Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester

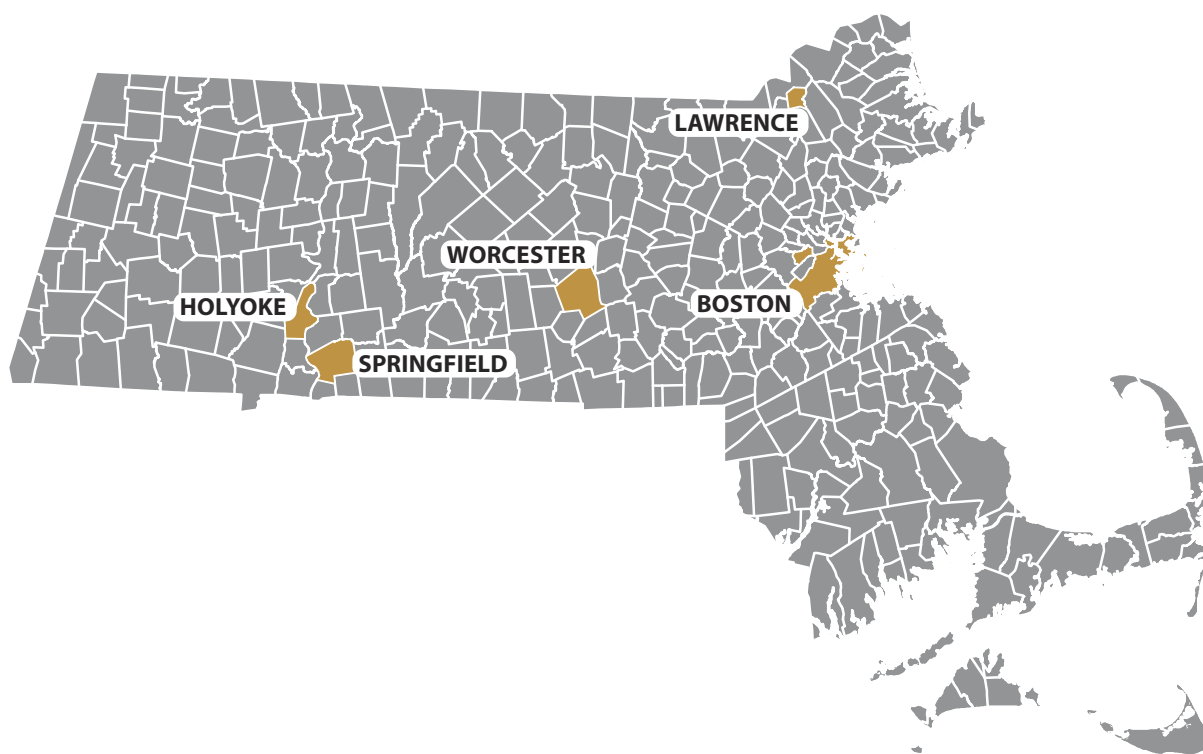


FIGURE 7

### Population Change 1990–2010

	1990 population	2000 population	2010 population	% change
Boston	574,283	589,141	617,594	8%
Worcester	169,759	172,648	181,045	7%
Springfield	156,983	152,083	153,060	-3%
Lawrence	70,207	72,143	76,377	9%
Holyoke	43,704	39,838	39,880	-9%

Source: U.S. Census, 1990, 2000, 2010.

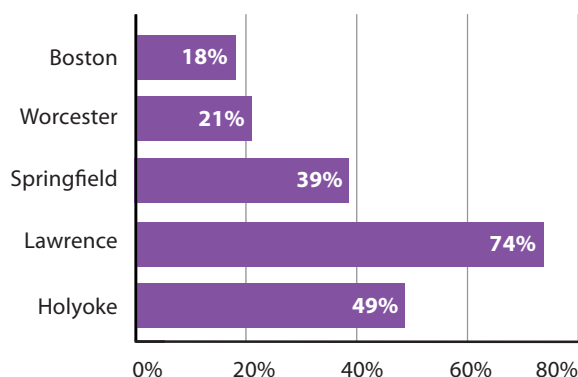
Boston is the largest city in Massachusetts; Worcester and Springfield, located in Central Massachusetts and Western Massachusetts (Pioneer Valley), respectively, are the next largest. Lawrence was the 12th largest in 2010, and Holyoke was the 37th largest. The combined population of these five cities is 1,067,956, which accounts for 16.3% of the state’s 6,547,629 residents. But the combined Latino population of these cities comprises 44.7% of the state’s overall Latino population.

Over the last quarter-century, growth patterns in these cities have been varied. Boston, Worcester, and Lawrence have seen increases in their populations of between 6% and almost 9% since 1990. Springfield and Holyoke, on the other hand, have seen decreases of 2.5% and 8.75%, respectively, in the same timeframe.

Boston has the smallest proportion of Latinos relative to its overall population, and Lawrence has the highest. Worcester’s population is close to Boston’s, while Springfield and Holyoke are closer to Lawrence.

FIGURE 8

### Percent of Latinos in Each Study Area, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

## BOSTON

In many ways, Boston is atypical of Massachusetts cities. With a 2010 population of 617,594 in 2010, Boston is the largest city in Massachusetts, nearly three and a half times larger than Worcester, the state’s second largest city, and four times larger than Springfield, the third largest. While not the most densely populated city in Massachusetts, it has the highest population density of the five cities in the study. Boston’s public school district enrollment for 2014–2015 was 54,312, which is the largest in the state and more than that of Springfield (25,645) and Worcester (25,254) combined. Its Fiscal Year 2015 municipal budget was \$2.7 billion, considerably larger than any other in the state.

Boston is also atypical because it is the political, economic, and cultural capital of Massachusetts. Boston’s story is known to students across the country; the other four cities are far less represented in the national narrative, if at all.<sup>15</sup> Because the state’s population was concentrated in eastern counties for much of Massachusetts’ history, Boston and its environs have wielded tremendous influence in the state legislature and seen their sons (there have been no female chief executives) in the governor’s chair more than any other region. Boston’s educational institutions, including those not located within the city’s official borders, are nationally and internationally renowned, as are many of its medical and research facilities, arts organizations and venues, libraries and museums, and professional and amateur sports teams.

As was noted in some of the research interviews with Boston residents, the city’s reputation as a center of higher education has also had an impact on its residents. Boston proper has 29 public, private, and for-profit colleges and universities; adding those in the immediate surrounding area brings the total to 53.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, many of Boston’s various higher education institutions have imprinted themselves on everyday life and the landscape of the city in a variety of ways: ubiquitous signage, public transportation stops, street and landmark names, college-themed clothing, and

college-sponsored events (from sports to academic endeavors) advertised throughout the city. All of this has the effect of keeping the colleges/universities, or more importantly, higher education generally, in the public mind. So when, for example, a young man from Boston said in an interview he planned on going to “college” he cited Bunker Hill Community College and Northeastern University as schools he wanted to attend, making no distinction between two- and four-year institutions, curricular differences, or the difference in costs. Rather, it appeared that he was invoking names of places he knew about as opposed to places or programs he had investigated.

### Demography and Boston Latinos

Of the five cities in this study, Boston has the most heterogeneous and numerically largest Latino population, though not the largest proportionally. Although there are more than 100,000 Latinos in Boston, they comprise only 18% of Boston residents.<sup>17</sup> The Latino population of Boston is also one of the city’s fastest growing populations—in the decade between 2000 and 2010, this population grew 28.2% in Boston alone—and, as in the other

FIGURE 9

#### Boston Latino Ancestry, 2010

	Boston Latino Residents	% of Latino Population
Puerto Rican	30,506	28.3%
Dominican	25,648	23.8%
Salvadorian	10,850	10.1%
Colombian	6,649	6.2%
Mexican	5,961	5.5%
Guatemalan	4,451	4.1%
Honduran	4,017	3.7%
Cuban	2,319	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

study areas, it is particularly young.<sup>18</sup> Latinos make up approximately 30% of the male population under age 18, and a small proportion of the population for older ages. Accordingly, 73% of the male Latino population in Boston is under 40 years old.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of educational attainment, Latinos comprise the largest ethno-racial group (40.8%) of the 2010–2011 Boston Public Schools (BPS) population. However, only 57.4% of this group graduated from high school in four years, which was less than the district-wide statistic of 64.4%. Conversely, the Latino dropout rate (18.5%) was higher than the overall BPS dropout rate (15.1%). Among Latino adults 25 years and older, 31.9% lack a high school diploma, the highest among the city’s ethno-racial groups, while only 17.5% have bachelor’s degrees, the lowest among the city’s ethno-racial groups but higher than that of other cities in the study. In fact, a higher percentage of Latino males age 25–39 in Boston have a four-year college degree than Latino males of that age in Massachusetts overall.<sup>20</sup>

## Economic Indicators and Boston Latinos

Boston’s economy today is built on education, health care, professional services, and tourism.<sup>21</sup> Of those workers in the 2013 civilian labor force, an estimated 89.4% were employed and 10.6% were unemployed. For Boston Latinos, 78% of men age 25–39 are employed and 12% are unemployed.<sup>22</sup> The bulk of Boston’s workforce was employed in these industries in 2013:<sup>23</sup>

The median income in Boston is \$53,601; the median income for Latino men age 25–39 is \$27,683.<sup>24</sup> This is the greatest disparity between overall and Latino male median incomes among the cities in this study—only Worcester comes close to matching it. The highest median wages in Boston, listed by the U.S. Census Bureau as annual salaries, were in occupations that tended to require advanced education of one form or another:<sup>25</sup>

Tourism is increasingly an important part of the Boston economy, although it is not always discernible in economic census data. In 2014, more

than 19 million international and domestic visitors came to the city.<sup>26</sup> The spillover into the local economy, whether from domestic or international travel, affects Boston hotels, restaurants, retail, and service industries positively. Importantly, though, this tends to increase accommodation and service sectors, which are among the lowest paying jobs in the city.

A lack of educational opportunity, high dropout rates, particularly in an economy that privileges (if not requires) educational achievement to move into better paying jobs, has placed burdens on Boston’s Latino population. Although it has improved since 2010 when Latinos had the highest unemployment rate in the city at 22.5% when the state rate was 15.2%, the Latino unemployment rate is still the highest in the city.<sup>27</sup> Those Latino men and women who were working in 2010 found employment overwhelmingly in sales and service jobs (64.9%), and worked in this industry more than any other ethno-racial group in Boston. At the same time, Latinos were the most underrepresented Boston

FIGURE 10

### Top Five Industries in Boston (2013)

	Workers employed	%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	103,195	31.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	51,575	15.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	36,411	11.0%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	30,677	9.30%
Retail trade	28,792	8.70%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.



ethno-racial group among professional and management positions (18.7%).<sup>28</sup> In terms of hourly wages, Latinos in professional and management positions earned \$20.51/hour, less per hour than all other ethno-racial groups in the same occupational category, and \$10.80/hour in sales and service jobs, less than all but Asians.<sup>29</sup> These trends persist. Compared to similarly aged Latino men in Massachusetts overall (and to the other cities in this study), Boston Latino males age 25–39 are more likely to work in a service job and less likely to work as a laborer, and they have a higher median income at \$27,683.<sup>30</sup> But this level of annual earning nevertheless places such workers firmly in the bottom of Boston’s earners according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Boston’s Latinos also lag significantly behind all other ethno-racial groups in terms of home ownership and medical coverage, and are in financially precarious situations. In 2010, only 13.1% of Boston’s Latino population owned homes, the lowest of any ethno-racial group

in the city—statewide, 25.6% of Latinos were homeowners.<sup>31</sup> Over 89% of Latinos age 15–34 live in rented residences in Boston.<sup>32</sup> Boston’s Latinos led all other groups in lack of medical insurance at 12.2% uninsured in 2010, nearly twice as high as the next closest ethno-racial group.<sup>33</sup> Finally, 28% of Latino males age 18–24 in Boston live below the poverty line. The rate falls to 14% for those 25–35 years old.<sup>34</sup>

In significant ways, Boston is not only different from other large cities in the state, but is also, and importantly, atypical. Its Latino population is significant, but is proportionally smaller than all other cities in this study. While there is considerable room for improvement, its Latinos are doing better than those in the other four cities but this is likely the result of Boston’s size and access to capital, cultural, and social resources. Put simply, there are more colleges, community-based organizations, jobs, locally-owned financial institutions, political power, and state offices in Boston than in any of the other cities.

FIGURE 11

### Highest and Lowest Paying Jobs by Occupation Type, Boston (2013)

Highest Paying		Lowest Paying	
Management, business, and financial occupations	\$65,844	Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	\$33,186
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	\$60,568	Sales and office occupations	\$31,367
Computer, engineering, and science occupations	\$56,885	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	\$27,395
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	\$56,172	Service occupations	\$21,372

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## HOLYOKE

With 39,880 residents in 2010, Holyoke is the smallest urban area in this study and the 37th largest city in Massachusetts. First settled in 1745, Holyoke was primarily a farming community north of Springfield until the nineteenth century when it was transformed into an early planned industrial community based on textile manufacturing and paper production. As in many New England manufacturing towns, immigrants flocked to Holyoke to find work in the burgeoning factories. But after 1920, as a result of restrictive immigration policy and deindustrialization, immigration all but ended for a half-century. Through that history, Holyoke’s population, a mere 3,245 in 1850, swelled to 60,203 by 1920, only to endure a long and slow numeric decline to today. Beginning in the 1970s, immigration resumed with a wave of Latino migrants (mainly Puerto Rican and Dominican) that softened the population dip, but with the continued out-migration of white residents, it could not slow the overall downward population trend. Consequently, the city’s demography was fundamentally recast.

Holyoke is one of the 24 communities served by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA), the largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts. Buses and vans connect Holyoke to surrounding communities, particularly Springfield. However,

according to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 3.5% of residents use public transportation to get to work. Rather, 86.5% took a car, truck, or van and 4.3% walked to work.<sup>35</sup> This is in sharp contrast to Boston, in which 33% of residents use public transportation not including taxis.

The Holyoke Public Schools have 5,573 students, 78.8% of which are “Hispanic,” nearly double Boston’s 40.9%.<sup>36</sup> Also unlike Boston, Holyoke has only a single institution of higher learning: Holyoke Community College.

### Demography and Holyoke Latinos

Latinos comprise 49% of the Holyoke population, a substantially larger percentage than in Boston. Forty-nine percent of Holyoke Latinos were native born outside of the United States, reflecting the particularly large Puerto Rican population. Thirty-five percent of Latinos were born in Massachusetts and only 4% were foreign born. More than 92% of Holyoke Latinos have roots in Puerto Rico.<sup>37</sup> While there are very few foreign born Latinos, the majority of Latino immigrants come from the Dominican Republic and Colombia.

Even more than Boston, this is a young population. In Holyoke, 74% of the Latino male population is under 40 years old and Latinos comprise more than 65% of the overall male population under 23 years old.

In terms of education, only 40.6% of Latinos in Holyoke graduated from high school in four years, which is lower than the 49.5% figure for all Holyoke students.<sup>38</sup> Also, a lower percentage of Latino males age 25–39 in Holyoke have a four-year college degree or a professional degree compared to the overall rate for Latino males of that age in Massachusetts; however, more have attained some college or earned a high school diploma than overall state medians.

FIGURE 12

### Holyoke Latino Ancestry, 2010

	Holyoke Latino Residents	% of Latino Population
Puerto Rican	17,825	92.3%
Dominican	349	1.8%
Colombian	202	1.0%
Mexican	167	0.9%
Cuban	70	0.4%
Salvadoran	68	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

## Economic Indicators and Holyoke Latinos

Like Boston, the economy of Holyoke today rests heavily on health care, education, and retail, but it still relies on a manufacturing sector. In 2013, Holyoke’s employed civilian workforce consisted of 14,806 people employed mainly in these industries:<sup>39</sup>

The Latino unemployment rate in 2010 for Holyoke (and Chicopee and Easthampton) was 19.8%, almost twice the rate of unemployment among the

FIGURE 13

### Top 5 Industries in Holyoke (2013)

	Workers employed	%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	4,798	32.4%
Retail trade	1,747	11.8%
Manufacturing	1,642	11.1%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	1,443	9.7%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	940	6.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 5-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.

white population. Comparatively, the statewide Latino unemployment rate at the time was 15.2%.<sup>40</sup>

Median income in Holyoke is \$31,628, significantly less than Boston’s median at \$53,601. The median income for Latino men age 25–39 in Holyoke is \$21,401.<sup>41</sup> The highest and lowest median incomes by occupation type for Holyoke overall is shown in **Figure 14**.

Overwhelmingly in 2010, Latinos in Holyoke-Chicopee were employed in laboring jobs such as farming, construction, production, and transportation (25.8%), and sales and service jobs (64.5%). But they were under-represented among the city’s professional and management positions (9.7%).<sup>42</sup> Holyoke Latino males age 25–39 are even more likely to work as laborers and less likely to have professional or service jobs. Only 15.9% of Latinos in Holyoke own houses, and the Latino uninsured rate there is 4.8%.

Looking at more recent statistics, the situation for young Latino men in Holyoke continues to be especially difficult. Fifty-six percent of Latino men age 25–39 are employed, lower than the Massachusetts employment rate of 76% for Latino males in that same group. The unemployment rate of 13% is higher for this age group than the Massachusetts rate and the median income of the same age group (\$21,401) is lower. Moreover, over 92% of Latinos age 15–34 live in rented residences. Thirty-five percent of Latino males age 18–24 and 31% of Latino males 25–35 live below the poverty line.<sup>43</sup>

FIGURE 14

### Highest and Lowest Paying Jobs by Occupation Type, Holyoke (2013)

Highest Paying		Lowest Paying	
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	\$56,071	Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	\$35,438
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	\$46,965	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	\$30,697
Computer, engineering, and science occupations	\$46,607	Sales and office occupations	\$30,382
Education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations	\$42,557	Service occupations	\$16,905

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## LAWRENCE

According to the 2010 census, Lawrence has 76,377 residents, making it the 12th largest city in Massachusetts and the fourth largest city in this study. In the 1840s, it was transformed into a textile center by a group of Boston entrepreneurs under the leadership of Abbott Lawrence, and grew rapidly. Its population in 1850 was 8,282; by 1920, it was 94,270, the highest in the city’s history.

Like Holyoke, decreased immigration and high out-migration sent Lawrence’s population downward from 1920, and, again like Holyoke, Lawrence experienced a large influx of Latino migrants in the 1970s.<sup>44</sup> However, the paths of these two cities diverged in two important ways. First, that influx was much more Dominican than Puerto Rican. Second, the population in Lawrence did not continue to decrease. Beginning in 1980, the population began to rise although it has not returned to its 1920 high.

The Lawrence Public Schools had 13,889 students in 2014–15.<sup>45</sup> Lawrence does not have a college within its borders, and its people overwhelmingly drive to work (85.7%) rather than take public transportation (3.8%).<sup>46</sup> The city’s 2015 municipal budget was \$247 million.

FIGURE 15

### Lawrence Latino Ancestry, 2010

	Lawrence Latino Residents	% of Latino Population
Dominican	30,243	53.7%
Puerto Rican	16,953	30.1%
Salvadorian	10,850	10.1%
Guatemalan	2,262	4.0%
Ecuadorian	597	1.1%
Mexican	551	1.0%
Cuban	369	0.7%
Colombian	335	0.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

### Demography and Lawrence Latinos

Like Holyoke, the Latino population of Lawrence is particularly high in numbers and proportion.<sup>47</sup> Latinos comprise 74% of the Lawrence population, with 44% of them being foreign born, 33% born in Massachusetts, and 15% native born outside of the 50 U.S. states. The large majority of Latinos are of Dominican (53.7%), Puerto Rican (30.1%), or Salvadoran (10.1%) heritage.

In Lawrence, as in other places in this study, this is a young population. Lawrence Latinos comprise more than 80% of the male population under 23 years old, with the prevalence of Latinos decreasing with every step up in age group. In Lawrence, 72% of the male Latino population is under 40 years old. The 2010 median age for Latino in the Lawrence-Methuen area is 26 years old, the youngest of any ethno-racial group in the area.<sup>48</sup>

The Latino education picture for Lawrence is bleaker than for many other areas in the study. The Lawrence Public Schools are 90.1% Latino, but only 47.6% graduate in four years, and 29.7% drop out entirely.<sup>49</sup> About 35% of Latino adults lack high school diplomas, and only 8.9% have bachelor’s degrees, the highest and lowest, respectively, of any ethno-racial group in the city.

### Economic Indicators and Lawrence Latinos

The employed civilian labor force of Lawrence consists of 30,936 workers. Manufacturing comprises the largest sector of the city’s economy with education, health care, and social assistance constituting a nearly equal portion. Retail, professional, and service jobs make up small portions.<sup>50</sup>

Despite their larger population in Lawrence, Latinos in 2010 had a labor force participation rate of 57.1%, the lowest of any ethno-racial group in the Lawrence-Methuen area and significantly lower than the statewide rate of 68.1%. A report by the Gastón Institute suggests “the low labor force participation rate . . . could be related to the

FIGURE 16

**Top 5 Industries in Lawrence (2013)**

	Workers employed	%
Manufacturing	6,805	22.0%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	6,077	19.6%
Retail trade	3,986	12.9%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	3,486	11.1%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	2,484	8.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 5-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.

youthful Latino population, suggesting they have more families with young children, which typically aligns with lower labor force participation rates due to caretaking needs.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the 2010 Latino unemployment rate of 9.7%, while lower than the overall Massachusetts Latino unemployment rate of 15.2%, was still

higher than other ethno-racial groups in the Lawrence-Methuen area.

As in other cities in this study, Latinos in the Lawrence-Methuen area were primarily employed in sales and service jobs (47.1%) in 2010 and far less in professional and management positions (13.1%). But in Lawrence, they were also employed extensively (39.8%) in farming, construction, production, and transportation jobs.<sup>52</sup> Average hourly wages for Latinos in 2010 are \$21.73 for professional and management jobs, \$10.94 for sales and service jobs, and \$10.10 for farming, construction, production, and transportation jobs.<sup>53</sup>

The 2013 median annual income for Lawrence is \$32,851, but the median for Latino men age 25–39 is \$23,254.<sup>54</sup> Overall, median annual incomes for Lawrence by occupation type range in 2013 from \$63,790 in professional positions such as computers and engineering to \$17,308 in service jobs.<sup>55</sup>

In terms of other economic indicators, 9.5% of all Latinos in the Lawrence-Methuen area are uninsured and only 23.2% are homeowners.<sup>56</sup> Over 85% of Latino householders age 15–34 live in rented residences. As to poverty levels, 25% of Latino males in Lawrence age 18–24, and 17% of Latino males age 25–35, live below the poverty line.

FIGURE 17

**Highest and Lowest Paying Jobs by Occupation Type, Lawrence (2013)**

Highest Paying		Lowest Paying	
Computer, engineering, and science occupations	\$63,790	Education, legal, community service, arts and media occupations	\$36,571
Management, business, and financial occupations	\$54,397	Sales and office occupations	\$22,729
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	\$47,500	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	\$22,553
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	\$37,020	Service occupations	\$17,308

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## SPRINGFIELD

Springfield, the third largest city in the state, identifies itself as the cultural urban center of western Massachusetts.<sup>57</sup> Founded in 1636, as settlers moved up the Connecticut River Valley, Springfield has long been an important hub for trade and transportation in western Massachusetts. In the nineteenth century, it moved into industrial manufacturing, particularly arms production, which attracted immigrant laborers to its factories. The city urbanized quickly, jumping from 2,312 residents in 1800 to 62,059 a century later, and its population continued to grow into the twentieth century. Like its sister-cities in central and eastern Massachusetts, Worcester and Boston, Springfield developed noteworthy cultural institutions such as museums, parks, and buildings as well as four colleges within its borders.

By 1960, Springfield’s population reached its highest point (174,463). As in Holyoke and Lawrence, the subsequent decrease caused by deindustrialization and suburbanization was softened by the waves of Latino immigrants, particularly Puerto Ricans, who began to arrive in small numbers in the 1940s, but increased in the 1970s.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the population continues to decrease overall.

The Springfield Public School system is the second largest in the state with 25,645 students. Of these, 63% are “Hispanic,” which is both a considerably smaller proportion than in Lawrence and Holyoke, but larger than in Boston or Worcester. The city’s 2015 municipal budget was \$581 million, a few million larger than that of Worcester.<sup>59</sup>

### Demography and Springfield Latinos

Latinos comprise 39% of Springfield’s population today. Thirty-seven percent of Latinos in Springfield were native born outside of the U.S. states, reflecting a large Puerto Rican population. Forty percent were born in Massachusetts and 9% were foreign born. Over 85% of Latinos in Springfield have a Puerto Rican heritage. This is an especially young population, even among all the study areas. The median age for Springfield Latinos is 24, the lowest of any ethno-racial group in Springfield.<sup>60</sup> Latinos make up over 50% of the male population under 18 years old and 74% of the male population under age 40.

In terms of educational attainment, only 37% of Springfield Latinos have high school diplomas, while only 7.4% have at least a bachelor’s degree.<sup>61</sup> However, a higher percentage of Latino males age 25–39 in Springfield have a four-year college degree compared to the overall rate for Latino males of that age in Massachusetts and a lower proportion dropped out of high school.

### Economic Indicators and Springfield Latinos

Like other cities in this study, the present-day economy of Springfield centers primarily on the health care and education industries, with supporting industries in retail, manufacturing, and service-related sectors that are comparatively-sized with each other.<sup>62</sup> The employed civilian workforce breaks down as shown in **Figure 19**.

FIGURE 18

#### Springfield Latino Ancestry, 2010

	Springfield Latino Residents	% of Latino Population
Puerto Rican	50,798	85.4%
Dominican	2,649	4.5%
Mexican	1,514	2.5%
Guatemalan	727	1.2%
Cuban	384	0.6%
Colombian	375	0.6%
Salvadorian	234	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Of a workforce that numbered 117,214 in 2013, the Census Bureau reported 8.6% were unemployed. For Latinos, however, 12% of men age 25–39 were unemployed.

A 2010 Gastón Institute report on Springfield found Latinos most commonly working in either service jobs (51.8%) or in farming, construction, production, and transportation jobs (32%). Far

fewer (16.2%), were among the ranks of professional and management positions; in fact, Latinos were less likely than any other ethno-racial group to hold these jobs. Hourly earnings were low: Latinos in sales and service jobs made \$10.69/hour on average in 2010, the lowest of any ethno-racial group in Springfield, while Latinos in laboring positions made \$11.64/hour.<sup>63</sup>

The 2013 median income overall in Springfield is \$34,311, but for Latino men age 25–39, it is \$19,754, which reflects their employment in service and laboring jobs. The highest and lowest paying occupations in Springfield overall are shown in **Figure 20**.<sup>64</sup>

A variety of other economic indicators also suggest the precariousness of Latino young men in Springfield. Only 27.1% of all Springfield Latinos were homeowners in 2010. Yet, 82% of Latinos age 25–34 and 94% of those age 15–24 live in rented residences as of 2013. At 10%, Latinos have the highest uninsured rate of any ethno-racial group in Springfield. Of Latino men age 18–24, 31% live below the poverty line, and 35% of Latino males 25–35 do, too.

FIGURE 19

### Top 5 Industries in Springfield (2013)

	Workers employed	%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	18,488	32.2%
Retail trade	6,324	11.0%
Manufacturing	5,911	10.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	5,871	10.2%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	4,310	7.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 5-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.

FIGURE 20

### Highest and Lowest Paying Jobs by Occupation Type, Springfield (2013)

Highest Paying		Lowest Paying	
Computer, engineering, and science occupations	\$61,521	Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	\$36,972
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	\$57,518	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	\$30,260
Management, business, and financial occupations	\$51,531	Sales and office occupations	\$26,959
Education, legal, community service, arts and media occupations	\$38,664	Service occupations	\$17,037

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## WORCESTER

Worcester is the second largest city in Massachusetts, and the largest city in central Massachusetts. Its population in 2010 was 181,045, which has been growing since 1990 after a mid-century dip from 203,486 in 1950. Although settled decades after Boston and Springfield, Worcester became a nineteenth-century manufacturing and transportation hub due to its central location in the state and southern New England. By 1900, it grew into an industrial powerhouse with a national profile, one that was able to support multiple industries including textile and shoe production, metal and wire manufacturing, and machine engineering. Many industrial fortunes made in Worcester were subsequently parlayed into arts and cultural organizations as well as educational institutions. Eight colleges, including the first Catholic college in New England, the second oldest graduate school in the country, and the state’s only public medical school, reside within its borders.<sup>65</sup>

The deindustrialization and suburbanization that affected other communities in this study similarly affected Worcester after 1950. An important difference, though, is that after suffering a 40,000 person decrease between 1950 and 1980, its population rebounded and has been on a steady incline since.

Part of this has to do with the arrival of Latino groups, especially after 1960, although Worcester was not necessarily their first stop. Rather, many Latinos, particularly Puerto Ricans, arrived in Worcester via New York; Hartford, Conn.; or Springfield.<sup>66</sup>

### Demography and Worcester Latinos

Latinos comprise 21% of the Worcester population. Forty-one percent of Latinos in Worcester were born in Massachusetts, 22% are foreign born, and 23% are native born outside of the U.S. states. The majority of Latinos (61%) in Worcester have a Puerto Rican heritage. Other common heritages include Dominican (11%), Salvadoran (7%), and Mexican (4%). The most common birthplaces of immigrants include the Dominican Republic (30.1%), Brazil (18.2%), and El Salvador (10.4%).

Similar to Boston but less than other communities in this study, Worcester’s Latino population comprises more than 30% of the male population under 18 years old, and the prevalence of Latinos decreases with older age groups. In fact, Worcester Latinos have the youngest median age (25) of all ethno-racial groups in the city.<sup>67</sup> Seventy-five percent of the Latino male population is under 40 years old.

The Worcester Public School district has 24,254 students, a few hundred less than Springfield, making it the third largest in the state. Its Latino population is 39.6%, slightly less than Boston’s and less than those of the other cities in this study as well.<sup>68</sup> Education figures from 2010 show that among adults 25 years and older, a third of Latinos (33.6%) lack high school diplomas, which is higher than other ethno-racial group. Yet, while most Latino men in Worcester age 25–39 have either completed high school or earned a high school equivalency, only 12.1% have completed a bachelor’s degree.<sup>69</sup>

FIGURE 21

### Worcester Latino Ancestry, 2010

	Worcester Latino Residents	% of Latino Population
Puerto Rican	23,074	61.0%
Dominican	4,221	11.2%
Salvadorian	2,776	7.3%
Mexican	1,345	3.6%
Ecuadorian	953	2.5%
Colombian	769	2.0%
Cuban	490	1.3%
Guatemalan	474	1.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.



## Economic Indicators and Worcester Latinos

Like the other large cities in Massachusetts, and nearly all those in this study, Worcester’s economy is transitioning into one that rests heavily on the education and health care industries, but increasingly on biotechnology as well. In 2013, the city’s employed civilian labor force of 83,511 workers were deployed primarily in the industries shown in **Figure 22**.<sup>70</sup>

FIGURE 22

### Top 5 Industries in Worcester (2013)

	Workers employed	%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	27,380	32.8%
Retail trade	9,978	11.9%
Manufacturing	9,359	11.2%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	7,356	8.8%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	6,828	8.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 5-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.

Included among the city’s top employers in 2014 were five health care organizations, three institutions of higher learning, one health and human service provider, one insurance company, one manufacturer, and the city itself, in which the largest single employment sub-division is its school department.<sup>71</sup>

Turning to median annual salaries by occupation type also indicates that Worcester’s economy is gearing more toward white-collar positions and away from the city’s roots in manufacturing. In 2013, Worcester’s highest and lowest paying jobs by occupation type are shown in **Figure 23**<sup>72</sup>

The median income overall in the city is \$45,932 but the median income for Latino males age 25–39 is \$26,666, a degree of disparity second only to Boston. In 2010, 66.4% of Latinos were employed in sales and service jobs, and 26.1% were employed in farming, construction, production, and transportation jobs, the highest of all ethno-racial groups in each sector. Conversely, only 7.5% of the Latino labor force worked in professional and management positions that are at the upper end of Worcester’s economy. A 2010 report by the Gastón Institute shows that in all categories, Worcester’s Latinos made less than other ethno-racial groups and that their wages were particularly low in farming, construction, production, and transportation jobs (\$9.32 per hour on average).<sup>73</sup>

FIGURE 23

### Highest and Lowest Paying Jobs by Occupation Type, Worcester (2013)

Highest Paying		Lowest Paying	
Computer, engineering, and science occupations	\$61,520	Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	\$37,510
Management, business, and financial occupations	\$58,200	Sales and office occupations	\$29,593
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	\$54,728	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	\$28,464
Education, legal, community service, arts and media occupations	\$39,969	Service occupations	\$20,908

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

As with the other communities in this study, economic indicators show the precarious situation of Latino men. In 2010, Worcester Latinos had the highest uninsured rate (7.1%) of any ethno-racial group, and only 10.1% were homeowners.<sup>74</sup> More recent figures show that over 87% of Worcester's Latinos age 15–34 live in rented residences. Indeed, 40% of Latino males age 18–24 and 31% of Latino males 25–35 live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate for Latino men age 25–39 in Worcester is 11%, which is 3% higher than the statewide level.

# A Young Man's Story:

## Geographic and Educational Transitions – Jose, Boston

*Jose was born in Baní, Dominican Republic. As a child, he dreamt of being a fireman. He loved dreaming of being on the fire truck and fighting fires. Over time, however, that dream faded. Jose went to a private school in Baní from first through fifth grade. It was at this school that Jose met his two best friends who also immigrated to Boston and remain his best friends today. Before beginning sixth grade, Jose's mother moved him to a different school that was better equipped to help him with his learning disability. He was embarrassed to admit that he went there, but today realizes it was much better for his particular needs.*

*While going to school in Baní, Jose's parents moved to New York City and left him in the Dominican Republic to live with family and continue his studies. In the States, his parents divorced and his mother moved to Boston to live with her sister. It was then that Jose moved to Boston to live with his mom at the start of what would be his 10th grade year. He enrolled in an international high school in Boston. Initially the school wanted to keep him back two years, claiming he was too young to be in 10th grade at age 14. In the end, he was made to repeat one year only, thereby beginning his schooling in the United States in ninth grade. Jose adjusted to the transition pretty quickly, which he attributes to his having studied English in the Dominican Republic. Jose says his high school proved to be a great experience for him, not least because he was surrounded by students like him who were from other countries, including the Dominican Republic.*

*During his high school years, Jose began thinking about college. For him, going to college was the route to "be someone." Today Jose is proud to say that he is halfway finished with his undergraduate degree at Suffolk University in Boston. He says he doesn't think he would have gotten to where he is today had he been left to do it all on his own. He says the high school task force helped him a lot through its mentoring programs, especially in helping him apply to college. Jose is currently majoring in communications and hopes to establish a career that allows him to take advantage of his Spanish.*



# Family

**T**his section explores how family life affects the education trajectories of the young men in this study. Qualitative researchers gathered data for this section through interviews and focus groups with Latino men, their parents and guardians, as well as through a survey administered to men currently enrolled in a four-year college, men who have completed some college coursework, and men who have graduated from a four-year college.

## Introduction

Families tend to have tremendous impacts on youth, whether in terms of a family's specific composition, its shared values, the time particular family members have to spend with one another, the hopes and expectations it has for other family members, the kind of home it can afford, the neighborhood it resides in, the schools it has access to, or its available resources for realizing its goals. Family life certainly impacted the education trajectory of young men in our study. Three important themes related to family emerged from stories that youth and their families in the five cities shared: the struggle for economic and social stability, the importance of strong family cohesion, and the negative consequences associated with economically and socially limited networks.<sup>75</sup>

In the focus groups involving Latino families in the five cities, most parents held high aspirations for their children—including but not limited to their children's attainment of a college degree—and viewed their role as providing moral, emotional, and material support to ensure their children's well-being. The survey of Latino male college students—some currently enrolled in a four-year college, some who have completed college courses, as well as some with undergraduate degrees from four-year institutions—illustrates that families

provide an important motivation for pursuing post-secondary education. Some 35% of the survey respondents report always knowing they would go to college—an indicator of high expectations. In fact, the second most important factor influencing why men pursued college, according to the survey, was to fulfill family expectations. Furthermore, family members were cited as the most influential factor for making plans for the future.

However, it became evident in the focus groups that parents' high aspirations for their children were tempered by their wariness about higher education's ability to move families out of poverty; the debt associated with completing college only compounded such beliefs. In general, the focus groups showed that many parents lacked knowledge about the college application process and many reported feeling hesitant about providing direct advice or assistance to their children.

## Economic and Social Stability

In interviews and focus groups with Latino young men and their families, most participants described being part of families that face multiple stressors that challenge economic and social stability. Families able to create and maintain strong ties and cohesion tended to provide specific supports such as making sure school work was completed, monitoring grades, and attending school meetings. This was the case with traditional as well as non-traditional families. For example, a young man named Jonathan who was born and raised in Worcester—and was a sophomore in college at the time of the interview—explained that while growing up, despite money being tight and moving around Worcester with his mother several different times, he went to his grandmother's home everyday after school where he would do his

homework, eat dinner, and play with his brother and cousins. He feels that despite not having a father at home and a mother who was often working, his close relationship with his mother and grandmother, coupled with their strictness, kept him out of trouble and made him into a responsible, motivated, and independent young man. Referring to his mom, Jonathan explained,

*My mom was really strict. She had a routine, you know. Homework—she would always make me watch her make a budget. She would have like, a monthly budget and she was like: “You see this? I don’t want you to do this. I don’t want you to have to worry about money. I don’t want you to not sleep at night and worry about how you’re going to pay the rent the next day.” She always pushed me to just like, you know, do good in school and don’t disobey teachers, you know? Respect people, respect elders and all that stuff. And so, that just stuck to me and that’s kind of how I behaved myself in school. She’s my rock. She really told me “this is what you have to do. Don’t get dissuaded, don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Go to college.”*

Conversely, a lack of family ties or having a family facing immediate and pressing needs related to poverty often did not provide enough supports to facilitate academic achievement. Some youth described a complete absence of family attachment resulting in severe challenges. For example, Nicolas, a young man from Worcester, gave a vivid account of the disadvantages encountered by young men living unstable lives with limited parental support. It is important to note that undocumented youth face similar challenges related to producing documentation needed to apply to college.

*They don’t know how to open a bank account. They don’t know where their ID is. They don’t know where their birth certificate is. They lost their Social Security card, you know? It was at their grandma’s house who they lived with ‘cause their mom kicked them out and they don’t know where she put it. Like, they can’t get a job, they can’t do anything. I know a bunch of them try finish to high school.*

*They can’t qualify for FAFSA. They burn bridges with their parents so they don’t want to give tax information. It’s pretty messed up. We have kids that want to go to college and then their parents will not support them because they don’t want to give up tax information. They don’t know how it works, they think it’s gonna backfire on them or something like that.*

Another example comes from a Springfield focus group where a young man reported that his mother worked three jobs and was rarely home. As a result, he had no one looking out for him. He often skipped school and eventually went to jail for selling drugs. He reports,

*My mother was always at work. [When] you’re not right at home, you’re not right at school at all. It’s tough. A lot of successful kids that go to high school and finish high school, they live with their grandma.*

To this day, this man says he has difficulty staying motivated and keeping a job—tendencies he attributes to having too much freedom at a young age.

Besides citing the importance of family members being present in their daily lives, men also mentioned religion, military service, sports, and community-based organizations as important support structures, and especially for young men in crisis.

## **Stressors Affecting Families’ Economic and Social Stability**

Many participants reported that their childhoods were marked by an intense struggle for economic and social stability. Such struggle came with multiple stressors, including English language proficiency, poverty, poor housing conditions, high housing mobility, and a wide variety of trauma that influenced family life. For example, a young man from Worcester named Camilo told researchers,

*I arrived in the United States when I was 17 with two pairs of shoes and extra pair of pants. Everything else I left behind in Guatemala, including my family.*

In this case, what might be referred to generally as trauma included different aspects of the *traumatic* experience of relocating to another country. He was leaving his home, friends, culture, and language, the people and property he knew and owned to go to a new, and in some ways, strange place. He expressed multiple stressors as “leaving everything behind” and then particularly noted that this included his family. Camilo’s experience of relocating to the United States necessarily produced a lack of family cohesion that could have provided him with comfort, support, and stability.

Other young men told stories of different stressors that gave rise to their feelings of insecurity and economic instability, which in turn created additional stressors. In a Lawrence interview, Juan claimed,

*Our house was a little ghetto, you know what I’m sayin’? And like, lights would go out . . . too many things wrong, like . . . it was always cold in each house.*

Juan elaborated how, one time during middle school, he lashed out at a teacher about his squalid living conditions saying,

*You’re not going home, turning on the lights, seeing cockroaches on the floor . . . you should be happy that I’m even here.*

In Juan’s case, these feelings of insecurity and instability mixed with feelings of resentment and a perceived lack of empathy on the part of his teacher. This confrontation with his teacher only added more stress to Juan’s life, which contributed to a sense of alienation from faculty. Such feelings prove especially problematic given that young men repeatedly told researchers they needed close mentoring during this time of their lives.

Quantitative data underscores the low levels of home ownership, high poverty levels, and high prevalence of single mother–headed households among Latinos in all five of the research sites (see **Figure 24**). The sorts of conditions reported in interviews from all five sites illustrated the difficult day-to-day lives of these young men and their families that clearly influenced life outside the home, especially at school.

### Family Poverty and Education

Family poverty affects education in both obvious and subtle ways. Research shows that poverty affects children’s ability to attend school regularly and to focus during school; research also shows that persistent poverty can undermine positive behavior in school.<sup>76</sup> The narratives that men in this study recounted reinforce and extend these known effects of poverty. Men’s stories shed light

FIGURE 24

### Renting, Poverty, and Single Mothers

	Massachusetts	Boston	Holyoke	Lawrence	Springfield	Worcester
% of Latinos Living in Rented Residences	87%	91%	94%	86%	85%	90%
% of Latino Males 18-35 Living Below Poverty Line	22%	20%	33%	21%	33%	35%
% of Latinos under 18 Living with Single Mom	43%	50%	58%	44%	54%	49%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

on how poverty hinders academic achievement in early adulthood, erode the belief that a person's effort alone leads to their success, and reinforce the notion that higher education is not within the reach of poor families.

Latino youth and families' narratives highlighted the effect of immigration on poverty and education. Several young men from Lawrence who had arrived in the United States as young adults noted extreme difficulty providing for their families, both here and abroad—doing so required working multiple jobs with long hours. Long work days, coupled with little disposable income, resulted in being unable to afford or participate in ESL classes, a resource they deemed essential to improving long-term financial security. Young male newcomers expressed that this disadvantage discouraged them from believing in the possibility of advancing their education.

In family focus groups in both Springfield and Holyoke, parents living in pockets of poverty expressed the belief that nothing short of leaving the area could improve the economic prospects of their children; some parents gave examples of college graduates working in retail and other service sector jobs as illustrations that completing college does not necessarily mean enjoying a higher standard of living for youth in their communities. These parents' narratives also revealed that even if they believed that a college degree would be financially beneficial to their children, living in poverty means focusing on immediate needs, making college feel like a luxury and out of reach. It is important to note, however, that parents did not lack hopes and aspirations for their children—many had high aspirations that involved alternatives to higher education, including free Web-based education resources that can provide their children with the knowledge they need to achieve their goals.

Both parents and young men expressed strong negative reactions to acquiring debt in order to finance post-secondary education. Some cited the inability of the family to leverage and pay

high loan amounts. A number of the men who participated in the study who are not currently enrolled in college expressed that they wanted to wait and save up to be able to afford college in order to avoid being saddled with debt. Among those who are currently enrolled in, have taken classes in, or have graduated from some form of post-secondary education, many work long hours to support their families. The survey found that 38% were the only wage earner in their families; 54% had a job and 27% reported having two jobs; and 32% of respondents reported working more than 40 hours.

## The Importance of Family Cohesion

Overwhelmingly, the study reveals two different scenarios for Latino youth with respect to their families: those with cohesive families and those without them. In general, youth with cohesive families reported more positive life outcomes. However, the stories present a complex picture of cohesive families: While some *increase the likelihood* of academic achievement, others *present challenges* to academic achievement. Families able to create and maintain strong ties and cohesion despite precarious economic and social conditions tend to provide specific types of support that foster academic achievement. Conversely, families overwhelmed by multiple stressors often did not provide enough supports to facilitate academic achievement and individual well-being. At the far end of spectrum, some youth described a complete absence of family attachment resulting in severe challenges.

## Benefits of Cohesive Families

Several young men described family support through examples of great sacrifice, strong value systems, and exemplary role models. For example, a current college student in Worcester named Andres told of parental sacrifice,

*My father worked 14 hours a day all through my childhood.... He told me he was willing to sacrifice so I could complete college.*



Richie, a college graduate from Worcester noted,

*Both my parents were housekeepers all their lives.... They told me they wanted something better for me than cleaning toilets and mopping floors.... I was almost never with both my parents. One of them was always working.*

Emphasizing the value of education, one Springfield young man named Carlos noted that his mother instilled in him the importance of knowing English. Reading in broken English every night,

*She would tell us . . . I can't leave you money, but I can leave you an education. And that was our bedtime story. She drilled that in us.*

Some young men told how parents were even willing to advocate for their sons, sometimes in hostile or difficult circumstances. Jonathan, a current college student in Worcester recalls his family's support on this front:

*I was bullied a lot when I was in, like, fifth grade. It got so bad, the bullying one day, that my mom, my aunt, my uncle, my grandma, they went to school and they talked with the principal. All of it was fixed but, even before that and especially after that, my mom was protective, especially since I had two brothers, and so she didn't want to make the same mistakes with me as she did with them.*

Similarly, a young man from Worcester named Pedro remembered how his mother stood up for him against,

*The biggest coke dealer in the neighborhood; my mom actually went to that house—gonna rip somebody's head off—'cause they tried getting me to sell.*

Many of the family support stories came in the form of leading by example. One Boston young man named Mateos remembered this:

*Ever since first grade, they've really pushed us to do really well. They lived in El Salvador. My dad had to walk miles to get to school and everything, and it was really hard for him and he really never had time because he was a farmer. He had to take care of everything else that happened around the house,*

*and then when he had time for school he went, and then he had to come back and work. It was really hard for him.... That's the thing; he pushed us to do better. I guess ever since he started pushing us, it was like, our mentality; we just worked really hard and weren't lazy with our school work.*

## Families Lacking Cohesion

Other youth lacked this kind of family support, which resulted in some facing difficult and even traumatic circumstances that necessarily took precedence over education. Eduardo, a Springfield young man whose mother struggled with substance abuse, recalled not only the lack of support, but also the responsibilities he took on in his mother's absence:

*In high school, things just got really bad and there wasn't any income coming in to the house to buy things anymore. My mom was receiving state benefits, and she wasn't working at one point, and she was like, getting the check; it would come, I would go cash it and pay the bills with her money, and whatever was left over I'd try to hide it or buy food or whatever, 'cause at that point I wasn't working. But when I did land my first job, I was paying a lot of the bills and stuff because sometimes she would disappear with the money, disappear with her check. It got harder and harder for me in high school. I had to choose either to support my family or go to school.*

Another young man from Springfield named Santiago remembered in a video interview,

*My mother left me at a very young age and I never knew my father. I went from foster home to foster home ... by the time I was in second grade I was getting myself to school on my own.*

For Eduardo, Santiago, and others like them lacking family cohesion and a stable household, concerns for school work and education in general quickly took a backseat to immediate needs that were not being met.

While foster care, extended families, and family friends sometimes stand in for a lack of families

in crisis and those lacking cohesion, this is not always the case. Some men interviewed who found themselves in such situations reported negative associations with the foster care system, including multiple placements, divided siblings, rough transitions, a lack of a caring adult in their life, a sense of hopelessness, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Alex, for example, who is also from Springfield, reported that he never finished his education because he bounced from one foster home to the next through elementary and middle school. He explains that this happened in part because he never felt like he belonged in foster families. But he also switched families a lot because he was always fighting and getting in trouble due to having lost his little brother, his only family and his best friend. Alex explained that at that time he had nothing but anger and survival on his mind:

*I was always robbing people. I would always fight with people. You know, getting in trouble. The only reason why I basically survived was because I kept being locked up. It was somewhere to feed, somewhere to sleep.*

After moving from foster home to foster home, he disappeared from the system at age 16. He recalled,

*I slept at a park one time in Pittsfield in the winter, under a skateboard park, under the ramp.*

Alex has since developed a strategy of moving from couch to couch among acquaintances—a practice he continues to rely on today while trying to obtain his High School Equivalency in the hopes of getting a job and gaining some stability.

## **Family Support: Extended Families and Role Models**

For many of the young men, extended families and active role models (especially male role models) provided a significant amount of support. Several expressed a broader definition of family than the traditional notion of a nuclear family: Families often included relatives, distant relatives, and fictive kin. In particular, men mentioned grandparents, uncles, cousins, step-parents, and non-blood related role models as important members of

their immediate families and among their closest relationships. In this context, youth reported positive associations with the parenting provided by grandparents. Many recalled the essential role grandparents played in establishing a sense of structure, routine, and accountability. This perception was especially strongly held among men who were raised by their grandparents. In a Springfield focus group, one man explained,

*There's profound respect for your grandma that you have more for your mom or dad. I remember I was living with my grandma for awhile and every time I get home from school, I just feel like studying.*

The broader definition of family also included female members of the community who were described as neighbors who kept watchful eyes on youth and played supportive roles such as caring for children and monitoring difficult neighborhood situations when men's families were not present.

Participants in the study also described family support in terms of role-modeling. Role-modeling ranged from following strong examples set by family members (both older and younger) to learning from the mistakes of siblings and others and thereby charting more positive pathways. There seemed to be a strong desire among youth to show leadership in this regard beyond family as they sought to be a positive example for schoolmates, youth in the community, and for the image of Latino youth in general. Importantly, youth did not view positive role modeling as limited to academics but rather to the formation of a positive healthy lifestyle able to contribute to the well-being of the family. One young man from Worcester named Kyle explained that he was greatly influenced by two different mentors: one man who was both a pastor and professor and another man who was a CEO of a music label he worked with. In speaking of the CEO, Kyle elaborates,

*The label I was in, the CEO was a big influence; he was a good mentor. He got me curious into studying a lot of things. I studied a lot of history and just where I come from. I was never educated on where I came from, I was always educated on Eurocentric*

*stuff. Then I studied that, and I actually studied my own religion. You know, deciphering the Bible, breaking that down, where that thing comes from. And of course the people who he had me research—MLK and all that and stuff like that. I was able to research men going through struggles and revolutionary figures.*

At numerous different points in interviews and focus groups, men emphasized the importance of having male role models, particularly in young men's lives. Immediate family members were often absent from the daily lives of young men, whether in families described as coherent or in families with low functioning abilities. Many family members remained in their country of origin, either not yet having made the move to the mainland United States or having returned to these countries. Fathers in particular were often absent from daily life for reasons ranging from work, estrangement from the young men's mothers, death, living abroad, incarceration, and divorce. With this overwhelming dearth of men's presence in many youths' lives, male role models stood out to those interviewed as being particularly important for the development of young men. Several of the men interviewed who had become fathers at a young age felt especially strongly about the importance of male role models and were determined to be present in the lives of their children.

That said, researchers also heard stories about fathers raising youth in exceptional ways and under difficult circumstances. For example, one young Boston man named Victor discussed how his father moved their young family from Florida to Massachusetts upon the death of his mother in order to provide them with better educational opportunities. Once in Boston, however, Victor was beset by violence in school, prompting his father to move him to a private Christian school at great financial sacrifice. Victor explains how in public school his peers would joke about one another's personal issues (appearance, families, socioeconomic status), sometimes prompting him to become violent. One occurrence precipitated his entrance to private school.

*I said, "Look, you could joke about anything else. I could be ugly to you, I don't care, whatever, but if you talk about my mom I'm hitting first and I'm talking later," because that was a sensitive topic for me. And some people had no boundaries; they thought they were the tough guy until I hit you right across your face. And I'm suspended for the next few days and I'm getting a butt whooping at home. But the butt whooping was simply because he realized why I got into a fight. But you know, even amongst all that I went to a private school and private really helped. It helped get myself together.*

## Challenges Associated with Family Cohesion

An important dimension to understand about this study's findings regarding family cohesion, or what some scholars have referred to as "*familismo*," is that these kinds of bonds are not always beneficial for youth, and sometimes produce formidable challenges for them. Strong collectivist tendencies or *familismo* (defined as loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity inherent to the family, whether fictive or non-fictive) common in Latino family structures coupled with precarious socioeconomic conditions can present challenges for individuals in their attempts to realize their own goals and aspirations.<sup>77</sup> A few young men spoke about their need to provide financial support to their families while in high school due to economic hardship. For example, Marc from Holyoke dropped out of school at age 17 to support his family by working two different jobs—at McDonald's and the Holyoke Mall. For Joe from Springfield, *familismo* was ingrained in him as early as elementary school when he saw it as his responsibility to take on a parental role in his parents' absence:

*My mom was always using [drugs] and my step-father would chase after her and pretty much they left us alone a few times when I was about maybe nine years old and my youngest sibling, my sister, was probably maybe a year and I was pretty much stuck there to kinda, you know, take the leadership role. Make sure they eat, bathe them, make sure my little brother goes to school.*

While close family ties in which family members depend on one another for support are not inherently challenging or detrimental to one's goals, the expectation of high school students to earn money for the family makes focusing on school and planning for the future difficult. This was indeed the case with Joe. By the time he was in high school, he said he had to choose between supporting his family or going to school,

*I couldn't let my little brother and sisters go without, so I ended up choosing them over school. I stopped going to school my junior year.*

And such expectations do not cease after high school. Men in college reported feeling the need to send money back to families, and thus feeling pressured to work while enrolled in college. Of those young men surveyed for this study, 84% currently have at least one job and 64% work at least 31 hours per week.

The support that men are expected to provide for their families is not only economic. Some men reported even having to defer going to college in order to care for a sick family member. Regardless of the type of support youth are expected to provide family members under the rubric of *familismo*, helping family members can deprive youth of the time and energy necessary to excel in school and progress on their educational pathways.

## Parental Oversight and Gender Disparity

Another interesting dynamic around family cohesion that emerged from this study was the different amount of parental oversight given to boys and to girls in the middle school and high school years. According to some men's testimonies in a Boston focus group, girls received more parental oversight than boys, and thus tended to have more structure in their lives. Conversely, boys were afforded more freedoms and unsupervised time. One of the men explained,

*It's less likely you see a guy studying because they are most likely out playing some kind of game or doing something else or even choosing not to study.*

Another young man added:

*I think there's two types of females, honestly. There's a weekday girl and there's a weekend girl. Girls they do all their stuff on the weekday and they have the weekend to party. But with guys there's no in between. They're going to do whatever they want the whole week. No studying, do whatever. You rarely see dudes studying. I go into the library and see mostly females.*

This disparity of oversight between boys and girls reportedly led to unsafe situations for young men and opened the door for them to make bad choices. This finding may be aligned with recent research on Latino youth, specifically Puerto Ricans, that finds some youth experience violence due to adolescent autonomy; the study also shows that this violence can decrease with family cohesion.<sup>78</sup>

## Youth in Search of Support: CBOs and Religion

For youth in families lacking cohesion or experiencing stressors across multiple life domains, a number of youth found strength, inspiration, and structure within community-based organizations and organized religion. Some reported gaining a framework that allowed them to reject unhealthy lifestyles. As Gabriel from Holyoke saw it,

*And now I'm in a Gateway to College program and I feel like, honestly, it's way better than the high school.... They accept sophomores and up—but a lot of people have stopped go[ing] ... to Holyoke High to enter the Gateway to College program. You get college credits and you get the high school credits too. And a lot of people have been more successful.... They graduated 90% of their whole people.*

Lucas, who grew up in Boston, was particularly thankful for the help he received from Hyde Square Task Force:

*If I was alone to do it myself, I don't think it would happen. But I did get help ... at the time I was a part of the Hyde Square Task Force ... so they basically took care of all my college situation. I didn't even meet with a counselor for high school. All my stuff was taken care of there.*

Others spoke of how religion and religious institutions stood in for the absence of familial support. Other studies have shown that religiosity among Latino youth has been found to promote educational goals by serving as a protective factor against youth oppositional behaviors and increasing social capital through increased inter-generational networks.<sup>79</sup> A young man named Ben interviewed on film described the role his beliefs played in dealing with a fire that destroyed his childhood home and caused much family turmoil. He explained,

*In middle school I started going to church.... I am a religious person, I believe in Jesus Christ, if he did not care about what people thought about him, why should I care about what people think about me.... Sometimes the best thing in our neighborhood is to not fit in.*

For Ben, no matter how much he felt unconventional in his community for being a religious person, he recognizes that his beliefs carried him through a time when his family was unable to provide him with the support he needed.

### **Parents' Hopes and Challenges in a Context of Limited Networks**

The family focus groups and interviews revealed uncertainty regarding how Latino families viewed formal education structures and higher education in particular. There was an overarching theme of "I want my children to have a better life than I did" and corresponding high aspirations for children to become professionals and establish secure lives. Overwhelmingly, parents expressed that supporting and caring for children lie at the heart of

successful parenting. Many made great sacrifices in this regard, working multiple jobs in order to provide children with not only basic needs, but also important opportunities such as trips back to their places of origin. Still, many could not provide for their children in ways they wished they could.

### **High Hopes but Limited Knowledge**

Numerous parents expressed feeling inadequate to equip their children with the knowledge necessary to navigate a pathway to an economically successful life. Most felt that families provide a source of strength to get back on one's feet and try again when adversity strikes, and schools were invoked as one source of adversity in their children's lives. One mother in a family focus group in Holyoke noted,

*The school does not help my son become a better student or person; all they know how to do is to suspend and punish him.*

Parents often expressed a disconnect between school and home and leaned toward providing general, supportive messages but avoided specific mention of higher education planning or goal setting. Relatedly, some men interviewed said they avoided bringing up the subject of college with their parents out of respect, not wanting to trigger feelings of inadequacy in them.

The cost of higher education was often mentioned by parents as a great concern. Many seemed hesitant to accept the proposition that accruing debt to obtain an education was a wise strategy. Some cited their own precarious economic conditions as reasons why children would not have the luxury of taking on debt. In other words, they did not see the family unit as capable of taking on a high degree of debt.

Similarly, parents spoke about their sense of trepidation that a minimum wage job was all that awaited their sons, even those with a college education. Census data in the "Community Profiles" sections shows that Latinos are more likely to be unemployed than other ethno-racial groups; when they are employed, they tend to

work in service jobs and lower-paying positions. This was particularly true in economically distressed areas such as Holyoke. Parents expressed a sense of hopelessness about the economic prospects in their region and a belief that a college education alone would not improve life opportunities. It is important to note that distinctions between two- and four-year college degrees and sometimes even trade-school degrees were often absent in discussions with families. In other words, any schooling beyond high school was often lumped into the same category, despite their differences. These beliefs about higher education do not constitute a lack of aspirations for children, but rather, point to a population that is unfamiliar with social mobility attributed to gains in higher education.

The reticence to become directly involved in education planning is important when one considers the active role parents play in the college application process in American society. Many Latino young men are at a disadvantage, finding themselves alone in navigating a pathway that even for the most informed parents and families is a difficult and complicated process. Indeed, one might conclude that few societal structures exist that require as high a degree of self-agency as traditional higher education institutions.

# A Young Man's Story:

## Supportive Personal Networks – Marco, Springfield

*Marco was born and raised in Springfield. He grew up in a home with his mother and older sister. Marco's mother instilled in him at a young age that she wanted him to go to school and get a high school diploma. Even as a single mother with plenty of responsibilities, she always woke him up and made him go to school. She didn't make it past the 11th grade because she moved around a lot when she was young. She was determined to raise a son who would graduate from high school and grow up to be a gentleman.*

*Though Marco has fond memories of elementary school, thinking back to middle school reminds him of some difficult challenges. Marco is gay and remembers being picked on for not being as tough as other boys and for hanging out with girls. He says he didn't let this get to him, though, because he has always been strong. High school presented Marco with even more challenges. He began experimenting more with his identity—letting his hair grow long, wearing makeup, painting his nails, and even wearing curlers in his hair sometimes. One of Marco's friends at the time was transgender and was going through the transitioning process. She helped him see that he should never be ashamed of who he is. Though other students would ridicule him, he would stand up for himself and explain that he was just expressing himself. He would tell them that he can do what he wants just like they can do what they want. Overall, Marco felt that his teachers were supportive. Some teachers were more set in their ways than others, and he would be careful not to push them beyond their comfort zone.*

*Of his schooling experience, what he is most proud of is that he pushed through it all and graduated. Marco's challenges in school were more social than academic. When he hears stories of kids who kill themselves for being bullied at school he considers himself lucky. He says, "Growing up, you go to school for a large chunk of your life. Sometimes it's hard to stay focused. A lot of people fall off." For Marco, graduation was one of his biggest accomplishments. He graduated with many people he had gone to school with since elementary school. He remembers everyone's family members cheering at the ceremony. He says graduating is really important, especially being black and Latino and in a "hard" place like Springfield where public schools lacked basic resources like enough textbooks and paper for all the students. "Walking across that stage and just feeling and hearing the roars with everybody crossing the stage with their diploma in their hand, it feels great. You feel like, if you can do that you can do anything, basically." Marco adds that he can't imagine having gotten through school to the point of graduating without the help of his mother.*

*What Marco liked most about his high school experience was learning new things—especially art and music—and hanging out with friends. He didn't think much about college at the time because he really didn't know what kind of career he wanted later in life. There were too many different things to choose from—he likes to do hair, fashion, home decor, create things, etc. The idea of having to pick one was hard for him, but when he was getting ready to go to high school, he had to choose, and he knew he wanted to go to the local trade high school. This felt like a wise decision at the time because he would have something to fall back on if he didn't make it to college. Marco ended up getting a license in cosmetology and has now worked in the field for seven years. Sometimes he wonders if he should go back to school but doesn't think he is ready. He loves doing hair because it makes people feel good, but he still isn't sure this is what he wants for the rest of his life. His ultimate goal now is to start saving money to open up his own salon.*





# Institutions

Institutions have a dramatic impact on the way youth see, experience, and act in the worlds in which they live. This is no less true for Latino young men in Massachusetts, who, like their peers in other groups and states, regularly interact with a variety of institutions throughout their lives. For the purposes of this study, researchers studied the impact that institutions, most notably educational institutions (schools) and to a lesser degree community-based organizations (CBOs), had on young Latino men. These institutions are the primary sites in which youth experience socialization and come to understand themselves in relationship to one another. Importantly, these are also locations in which pathways of future success begin to be paved and gain momentum. This section on institutions explores how some young Latino men in the five research sites perceive the educational institutions that shape the world in which they live, work, learn, and attempt to get ahead.

The vast majority of the discussions with these young men were about their experiences and perceptions of their middle school, high school, and post-high school years. In general, elementary-school age was the least memorable for study participants. When the men discussed this stage in their lives, they spoke mostly about family, neighborhood, leisure activities, and school. Middle-school age was largely about figuring out oneself and one's "lot" in life. Middle-school age contrasted with high-school age and post-high-school age in that these later stages involved more "real world" thinking. High-school age was largely future-oriented in terms of graduating, dropping out, going to college, making money, etc. Post-high-school age was often about men's current aspirations, challenges, and reflections on how their lives might be better had their circumstances and decisions in the past been different.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest hurdles to college and occupational success for Latino young men came well *before* college. These obstacles are embedded in different domains of their lives before they sit for the SATs, before they arrive on campus, and before they pick up the degree.

## Stories of Ambivalence

Like the prior section on family, the stories young men told about institutions were anything but uniform; however, the narratives evidenced a considerable focus on educational institutions more than other aspects of their lives. This finding should not prove terribly surprising given the amount of time youth typically spend in school. Accordingly, the narratives combine to form a polyphony of young Latino men's experiences in the institutions of all five research sites, particularly in schools. This multi-voiced narrative around institutions is composed of stories of young Latinos who differed in their level of educational attainment: Some are high school completers, community college students, or four-year college completers while others did not complete high school, earned their HSEDs (High School Equivalency Diplomas, formerly known as GEDs), or had taken college courses but did not finish their studies. The variety of late and post-secondary educational experiences grows even more diverse when one considers the many subject positions of our research sample: e.g., young men who are first generation college students; young men who are not enrolled in college and have no family members who have ever attended college; young men who were never encouraged to attend college; young men whose parents both attended college; young men who attended private school, public school, and charter schools (in the U.S. and abroad); young men who frequently changed schools vs. young men who attended

the same school from elementary through high school; young men from immigrant households; young men who moved frequently within the United States vs. young men who remained in the neighborhoods of their parents and grandparents in one of the research sites; young men with overwhelmingly positive experiences in school and young men who reported largely negative experiences in school. That is to say, young Latino men in these five Massachusetts communities evidence a tremendous amount of variation in their lives and educational experiences and, thus, their relationship to educational and related institutions.

Stepping back from the individual stories in an attempt to discern the experience of young Latino men across the five research sites, researchers were able to identify some significant patterns. In looking at school experiences, for example, while some young men related positive experiences others told of more negative ones. More commonly, however, were stories that were less stark: positive stories that often had troubling elements embedded in them or negative stories that contained uplifting dimensions. A couple of stories illustrate this point quite well.

The first comes from Lawrence. A young man named Matías told researchers he left the Lawrence Public School System to attend “the Voke,” Greater Lawrence Technical School, a level-one school. It was something his mother supported because she was fearful of the “bad influences” he might encounter in the comprehensive high school. He, too, viewed it as a good move for him because until that point, teachers “really didn’t ask you how you felt . . . they would just teach you and be on their way.” However, he explained,

*Some teachers . . . in the Voke, they actually had a conversation with you. I felt like the Voke was actually a good small school. Like they actually cared for their students.*

Here, then, was a narrative in which a young man related a positive experience, but with the qualification that a less positive experience had prompted and, to an extent, justified the path he took. It

is also possible to read this as a good example of the need for alternatives when established institutions fail.

A second story conveying this theme of bitter-sweet experiences with institutions comes from Springfield. A young man named Leonardo told of a principal who had made a difference in his life and in the life of his family. Amid a series of life transitions, the principal “looked out” for the student and “was very involved in us [his family] learning the language.” Leonardo noted, the principal “was proud that we actually started learning English” and that he started school “in remedial classes, and then I was [moved into] regular classes.” Deeper investigation into Leonardo’s life, though, showed his mother was on the school’s parent-teacher council and had a level of access to the principal and a relationship with him that many other students and parents did not, which explained some of the extra attention. Here, too, is a multi-dimensional story. While there was a lot of good that came out of the relationship with the principal, one has to wonder what happened to those families and students who did not have or were not able to have that relationship.

These two stories, even with their troubling elements, might best be positioned somewhere along a broad spectrum of “school experiences.” So, too, might narratives of young men that spoke of adversity from which they were able to bounce back, occasionally with the help of a teacher or an administrator. A Worcester young man named Daniel remembered that his principal in elementary school was the “father figure” for him. Again, a positive recollection and, as it turned out, an important development because Daniel’s father was not part of his life, which led to more troubling developments later in his life. A gay-identified Holyoke man in his early 20s named Isaac, who by his own admission had a mild history of trouble-making, recounted how he got involved in a fight because someone used a homophobic epithet to refer to one of his friends at Holyoke High School. Isaac was arrested and suspended, and ultimately put on probation. Returning to school a few weeks

after, he reported that school personnel helped him catch up on missed work and reintegrate back into school. Reflecting on it, he said,

*Sometimes when you are in high school you are so caught up in what everybody thinks, and you're so shy, and you don't notice that the teachers actually do care for you. You may feel like they don't, but they actually do because [after] those two weeks out of school, I came back and it's like everybody was like, "Oh my God, where were you? We missed you."*

Isaac was able to get back on track in school and ultimately begin taking courses at a community college; at the time of his interview; however, he was struggling to do well in his classes, concerned about his financial stability, and awaiting the birth of his first child.

A handful of the stories researchers uncovered were particularly inspiring and, once again, multi-dimensional. One student from Boston named Emilio, for instance, a U.S.-born child of Central American parents, had an opportunity to participate in the METCO program. Described by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website as "a voluntary program intended to expand education opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation," it aims at "permitting students in certain cities to attend public school in communities that have agreed to participate." Living his whole life in Hyde Park, Emilio spent his 1–12 grades in the Sudbury Public Schools system (including Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School), where he received what he called "the best experience ever for education." He explained,

*Not to bash on the Boston public schools, [but the teachers at Lincoln-Sudbury] put a lot more attention on education rather than sports. . . . From first grade to fifth grade, I learned a lot from the teachers that taught us through math, science, English, history, all that. I made good connections with teachers. From middle school, there was a little more variety of classes that we got to choose and they really taught us a lot, and the kids really paid attention in class through high school. Like,*

*in high school, there were so many courses it was ridiculous.*

In the context of the larger conversation, Emilio meant "ridiculous" in a positive way, meaning that there were so many courses to choose from that it was overwhelming. He also noted there was a clear difference between his experiences and those of others in his neighborhood who were not in similar programs. "I felt like teachers put more attention on us," he said, and "I looked at the behavior of students in relation to the kids who went to Sudbury public schools and Boston public schools. They were very different." He continued,

*Whenever I walked around in my neighborhood, I noticed, like, all these people and they were acting really different from how people acted in Sudbury. I figured maybe, like, how they acted at home, how they acted at school, how they acted with their friends and everything like that, it just connected that maybe I'm getting a better education. Plus, the METCO advisers and my parents told me "you guys are getting the best education possible."*

Ironically, Emilio claimed he did not easily fit into either his neighborhood or his school worlds, though he did manage to develop a close-knit group of friends at Lincoln-Sudbury—a mix of METCO and non-METCO students who were well liked by several teachers there. Not going to school with peers from his neighborhood, Emilio had little in common with them, and, as he saw it,

*METCO students didn't really like how the Sudbury students carried themselves and the same way the Sudbury kids didn't like how the METCO students carried themselves. . . . They didn't want to relate to them or hang out with them.*

At the time of his interview, Emilio was enrolled in an engineering college in Massachusetts.<sup>80</sup>

Another story with results that could be seen as favorable, at least from the perspective of graduating from high school and moving on to college, comes from Lawrence, and it presents a different set of issues. Coming from a family with an educated background, Marco was living in

Boston but was raised in Lawrence and much of his (and his siblings') early education happened at a Christian school outside of the city. He claimed this was a parental decision,

*My parents didn't want us to be part of the Lawrence Public Schools system because of the stigma behind it—that we were going to rebel or something. They didn't want us to have a bad influence.*

When Marco was in middle school, his parents moved their children into a new program in the Lawrence system, which he felt good about,

*Me and my brother, having that private education, we were top of the class. We did great, we felt like we were geniuses. Super smart, and the teachers were great.*

But when Marco's older brother, who had transferred to Lawrence High School, started "getting into bad habits [and] got in trouble with the law," his parents got scared and sent him and his younger siblings back to the religious school. This was not the end of the story, though. The small religious school had "very limited resources" and Marco was "sure the teachers were on a humble salary" but he was "not sure exactly what their qualifications were." As he got older, Marco also grew dissatisfied with the lack of avenues for social growth in a small religious school, which he likened to being in "a bubble." Accordingly, in 10th grade, he worked it out with his parents that he would finish his last two years at Lawrence High School. This was, to him, "a very positive" experience:

*I was top in the class, did very well. I had my support at home, my own personal drive to succeed. I wanted to do well. At the same time, I always felt driven, I felt like I always had someone to tell me that I can succeed: "You can do it. You can do this. What's your next step?" That's what I felt.*

Marco went on to complete a degree at a four-year private college in Massachusetts.

Just barely scratching the surface of these vignettes offers much insight into how institutions can

inform the choices and pathways available to students. While Emilio appeared to thrive academically in a relatively wealthy, suburban school district, he was distant from the mainstream body of students and apart from those in his own neighborhood. Marco, in a smaller suburban religious school, clamored to go to an urban high school and—in part because of his previous educational experiences and family network—did particularly well and felt supported within the system. Marco's older sibling reportedly ran into the kind of trouble one stereotypically associates with an urban school district, yet that same district was attractive to Emilio because of the social possibilities a larger school population could offer. And what of Marco, the Lincoln-Sudbury-educated student, who saw in his Jamaica Plain peers the result of a school system he was told was inferior? He had difficulty reconciling his education with that of his neighborhood peers although he was thankful for it.

What is one to make of these complex stories of young Latino men's relationship to educational institutions? Generally speaking, these narratives bring to light that these men are in the process of negotiating their place in and relationship to institutions. They are neither fully integrated into a system they see as successful and completely beneficial to their lives nor are they fully excluded from and seeing no value in these institutions. They find themselves caught somewhere in between these two extremes, trying to make sense of the ways in which they do and do not fit in.<sup>81</sup> On the one hand, this finding is unfortunate because it suggests that Latino young men face a formidable challenge: Institutions are not places where, on average, they sense that they belong and trust that their best interests are being served. Sadly, this reality often involves feelings of resignation when it comes to school, secondary as much as post-secondary. On the other hand, this finding speaks to the timeliness of this research: If these young Latino men are indeed still negotiating their place in these institutions and considering the extent to which they are valuable to their futures, it is not too late to carve out a rightful place for them and provide them pathways for achieving success.

It is important to underscore that although some narratives had “desirable” or “favorable” elements (e.g., young men completed high school and moved on to college), such a development did not necessarily translate into higher education success. The quantitative data on Latino students suggests that even if they get to the point of college acceptance and arrive in school for that first semester, persistence rates drop precipitously for students from all five research sites. **Figure 25** shows the percent of Latino male ninth graders who remain enrolled in any college (including two- and four-year) by semester. Twenty percent of Latino males enroll in at least one semester of college within six months of their projected high school graduation, but only 13.5% of Latino males enroll in at least three semesters. This means that of those who enrolled in college, 67.7% did not make it past the first year. Each of the urban areas also experiences a significant drop in enrollment between the first and third semesters. Put differently, of the original cohort of students enrolling in the first semester, 32.3% of them leave by the start of the second year, 49.6% leave by the third year, and 71.8% by the start of fourth year.<sup>82</sup> These persistence rates are consistently lower than those of non-Latino males. For comparison, of the non-Latino males who enroll in the first semester of college, 17.0% leave

by the start of their second year, 28.6% have left by their third year, and 52.7% have left by the start of their fourth year. At each stage, non-Latino males have lower college attrition rates.

The data related to college attendance and graduation for Latino males is similarly discouraging. Latino males enroll in college at a lower rate than non-Latino males. In Massachusetts, 51% of non-Latino ninth graders enroll in two- or four-year college in the eight months after their projected four-year high school graduation date. The rate is less than half for Latino males, with only 22% enrolling in college on time. Including students who enroll in college 18 months following their projected high school graduation does not change this comparison dramatically: 56% of non-Latino males in Massachusetts have enrolled in college compared to 28% of Latino males. This pattern of Latino males going to college at a significantly lower rate than their non-Latino male peers is present in each of the five urban areas.

The college enrollment gap is larger when focusing on four-year college alone. In Massachusetts, 40% of non-Latino male ninth graders enroll in four-year college within eight months of their projected high school graduation, compared to 11% of Latino males.

FIGURE 25

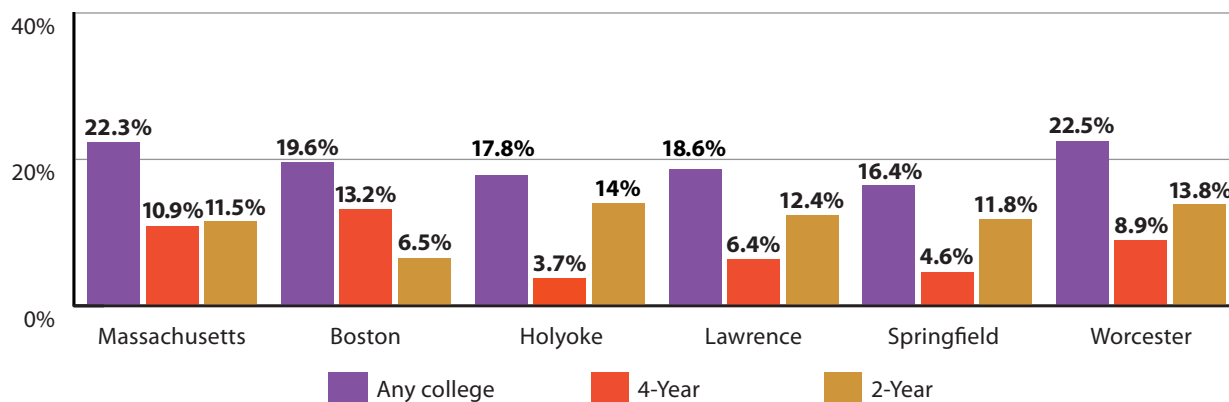
### Latino Male College Persistence

	At Least 1 Semester 6 Months After Projected HS Graduation	At Least 3 Semesters 1.5 Years After Projected HS Graduation	At Least 5 Semesters 2.5 Years After Projected HS Graduation	At Least 7 Semesters 3.5 Years After Projected HS Graduation
Massachusetts	20%	13%	10%	6%
Boston	18%	13%	10%	5%
Holyoke	17%	10%	8%	4%
Lawrence	15%	12%	9%	5%
Springfield	15%	8%	5%	2%
Worcester	22%	13%	9%	5%

Source: MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data. All calculations use male Latino students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in 2003-04 through 2006-07. Semesters at two- and four-year institutions are included.

FIGURE 26

### Latino Male Public School 9th Graders Enrolling in College Within 8 Months of Projected 4-Year Graduation



Source: MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data, male Latino students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in the 2003-04 through 2008-09 school year.

The Latino male enrollment rate for two- and four-year college combined is lower in Boston (19.6%), Holyoke (17.8%), Lawrence (18.6%), and Springfield (16.4%) relative to Massachusetts. Worcester’s rate is similar to Massachusetts at 22.5%. **Figure 26** displays these statistics and the rates for two- and four-year college separately.

Boston has the highest four-year college enrollment with 13.2% of Latino male ninth graders enrolling within eight months of their projected high school graduation. This exceeds the other urban areas and Massachusetts’ rate for Latino males. The Latino male four-year college enrollment for the other urban areas is lower than the state’s rate, particularly for Holyoke, where 3.7% of Latino males enrolled in four-year college.

In Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester, the Latino male two-year college enrollment exceeds the state rate with over 11.7% in each of the areas compared to the state’s 11.5% and Boston’s 6.5%.

**Figure 27** shows the types of four-year colleges where Latino males initially enroll. Private colleges are a more common choice among Latino males in Boston while more Latino males in Lawrence choose public colleges. In-state schools are the predominant choice across all of the urban areas.

Over 50% of Latino male four-year college enrollees in each urban area attend competitive colleges (as defined by Barron’s 2009 ranking). In Boston, over 30% attend the most competitive colleges (defined as very competitive, highly competitive, or most competitive by Barron’s ranking) while the rates for competitive college enrollment are below 17% in the other urban areas.

Turning to college graduation, **Figure 28** shows the two- and four-year college five-year graduation rates for male ninth graders. Latino males lag behind non-Latino males in four- and two-year college graduation rates. Six percent of Latino male ninth graders in Massachusetts graduate from a four-year college with five years, compared to 28.9% of non-Latino males. Boston, Lawrence, and Worcester have male Latino four-year graduation rates of 5.6%, 5.0% and 4.6%, respectively, while Holyoke and Springfield have lower rates of 1.3% and 2.3%. The two-year college graduation rate is approximately half for Latino males relative to non-Latino males (6.1% compared to 3.3%). Two-year college graduation is more common in Holyoke (4.2%), Lawrence (3.8%), and Worcester (3.5%) and less common in Boston (1.8%) and Springfield (2.2%).

FIGURE 27A

### College Type of Latino Males Enrolling in 4-Year Colleges

#### PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

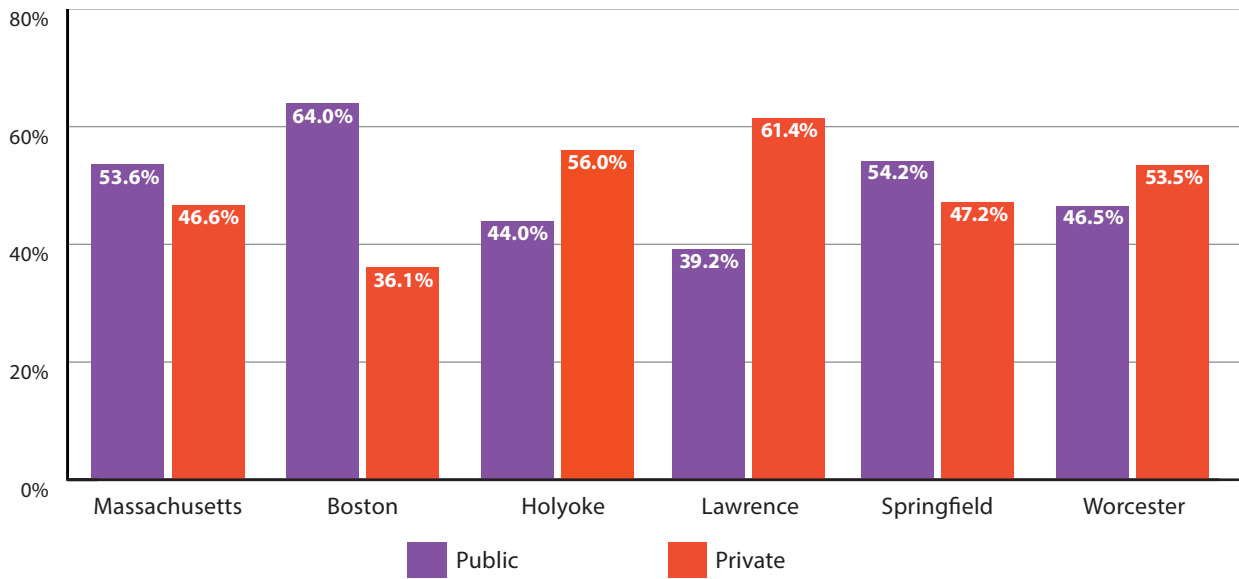


FIGURE 27B

### College Type of Latino Males Enrolling in 4-Year Colleges

#### IN-STATE VS. OUT-OF-STATE

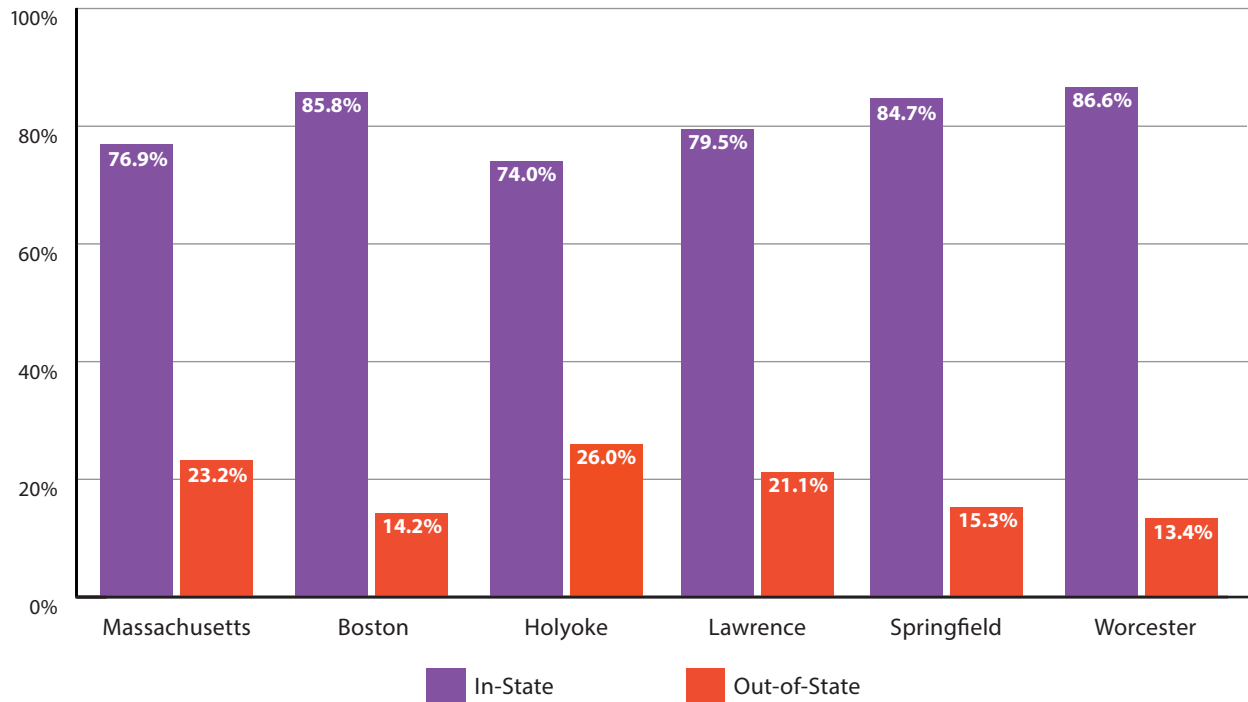
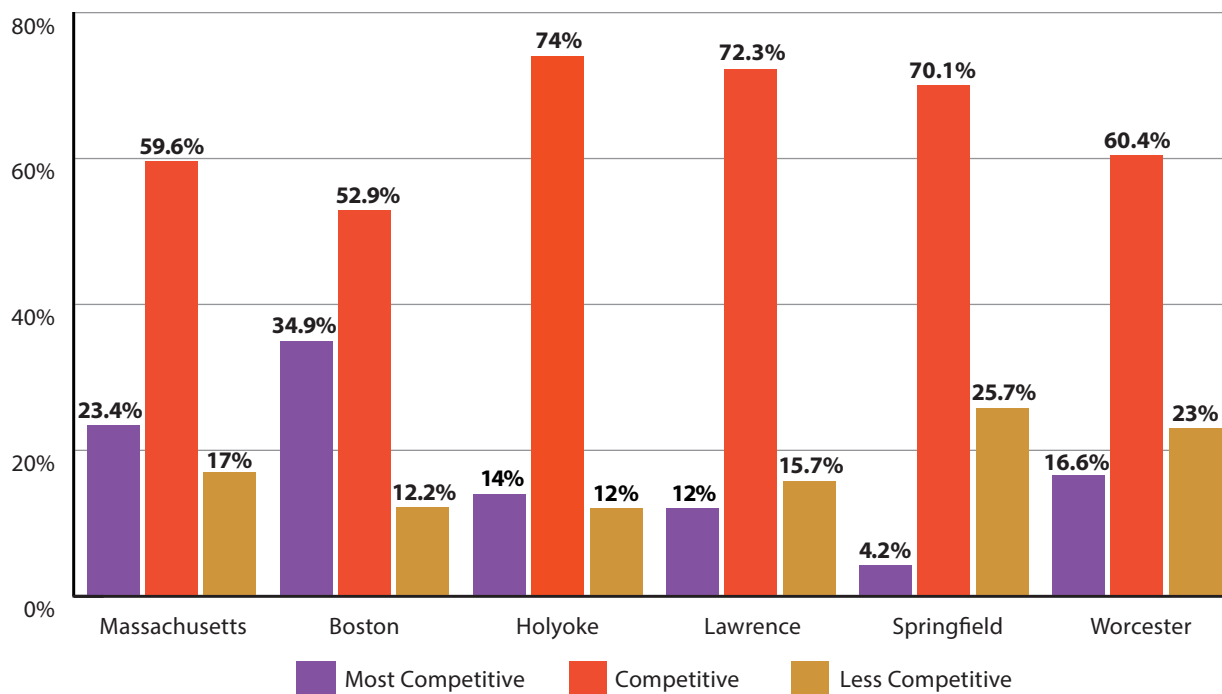


FIGURE 27C

## College Type of Latino Males Enrolling in 4-Year Colleges

### LEVEL OF COMPETITION



Source: MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data, male Latino students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in the 2003-04 through 2008-09 school years who enroll in 4-year college within 8 months of their projected 4-year high school graduation date. College competitiveness refers to the Barron's selectiveness rankings. Most competitive are colleges ranked "very competitive" or higher by Barron's in 2009.

### Lack of College Know-How

A number of stories could be told to explain these low rates of college entrance, persistence, and graduation for young Latino men. While the causes are surely multiple, one recurring explanation in the narratives of the young men bears noting: A number of them expressed that they lacked a certain amount of college know-how, or familiarity with the process of going to college and all it is likely to entail, including, but not limited to, the difference between two- and four-year colleges. For, Ian, a young man from Greater Lawrence Technical School, for example, there were major adjustments when he entered Northern Essex Community College, where he was still a student at the time of his interview. As he put it,

*Everything was f\*\*\*n insane. The books were expensive and the way that the grading system is, for Northern Essex, is like ridiculous [absurd] compared to schools I was at.*

The student from Lawrence who went on to a four-year private school completed his college degree, a desirable outcome, but he ended up "graduating with \$80,000 of student loan debt, paying just under \$1,000 a month, [and] a mortgage" at 23 years old. While he neither questioned the worth of the degree nor did he engage in a cost/benefit analysis of the debt, he did wonder,

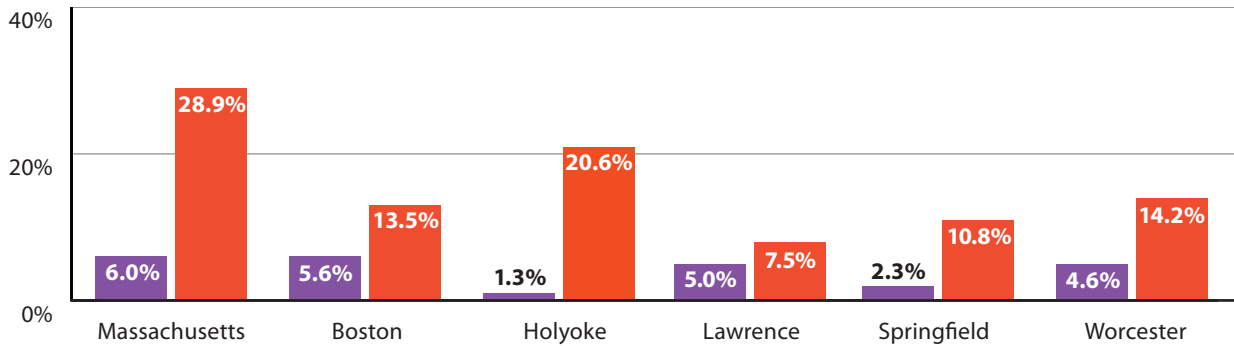
*In high school, they could start early . . . talking about the affordability of college or at least mapping out a road to why do kids want to go to their dream school. But let's be real. If that school is out of*



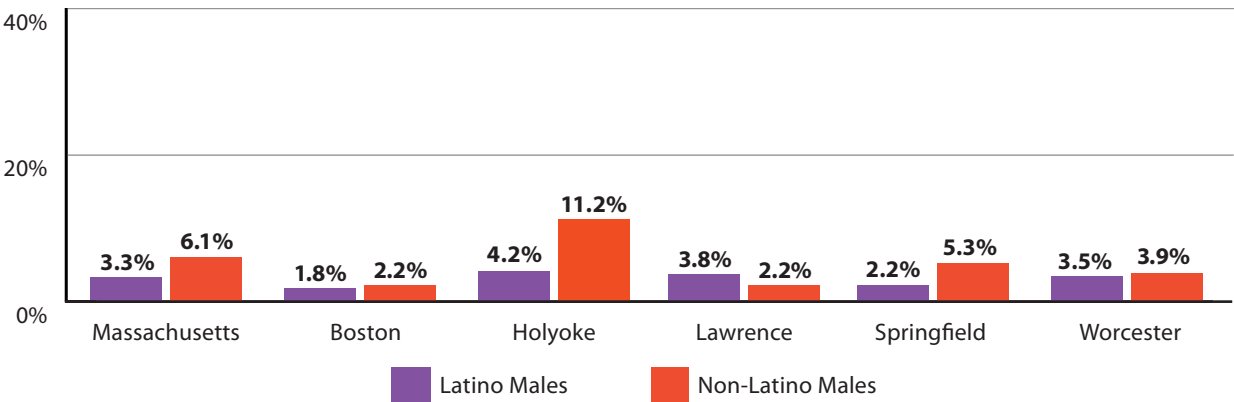
FIGURE 28A & B

## 5 Year College Graduation Rate

### 4 YEAR COLLEGE



### 2 YEAR COLLEGE



Source: MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data, male Latino students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in the 2003-04 through 2008-09 school year.

*your reach, and not going to your finances or your parent's finances, let's find another option. Let's see a plan where we could go to a community college your first two years, transfer out, and go to other school. But at least make sure people understand that piece.*

Lack of proper preparation for the rigor of higher education, lack of skills to assess prudently the impact that college (whether two- or four-year) might have on your life, and lack of knowledge about navigating the systems of higher education once there, were all prevalent themes in the young men's narratives.

This is the other end of the spectrum, the other part of the range of experiences: What of those who do

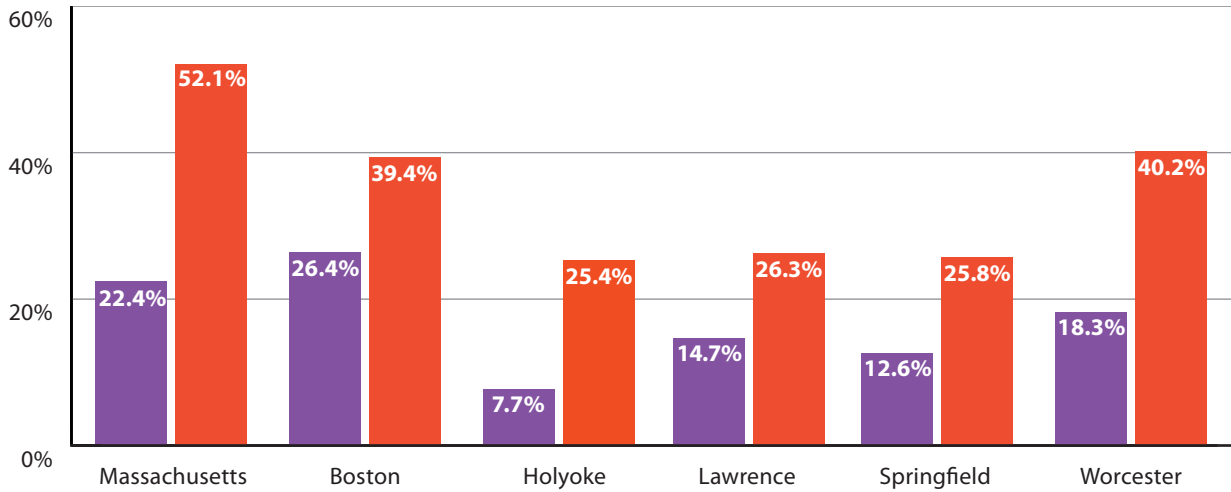
not make it to the doors of higher education? Of the men whom researchers engaged in interviews and focus groups, a small minority (6.5%) had graduated from two- or four-year institutions. In fact, the quantitative data on the college graduation rates for Latino males from Massachusetts' largest urban areas lines up well with figures in the qualitative findings. But even the numbers of Latino males entering two-year and especially four-year institutions after high school are low, as shown in **Figure 29**.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, another important piece of data necessary to comprehend the situation fully is the high school dropout rate, depicted in **Figure 30**, which shows that 60% of Latino males who drop out

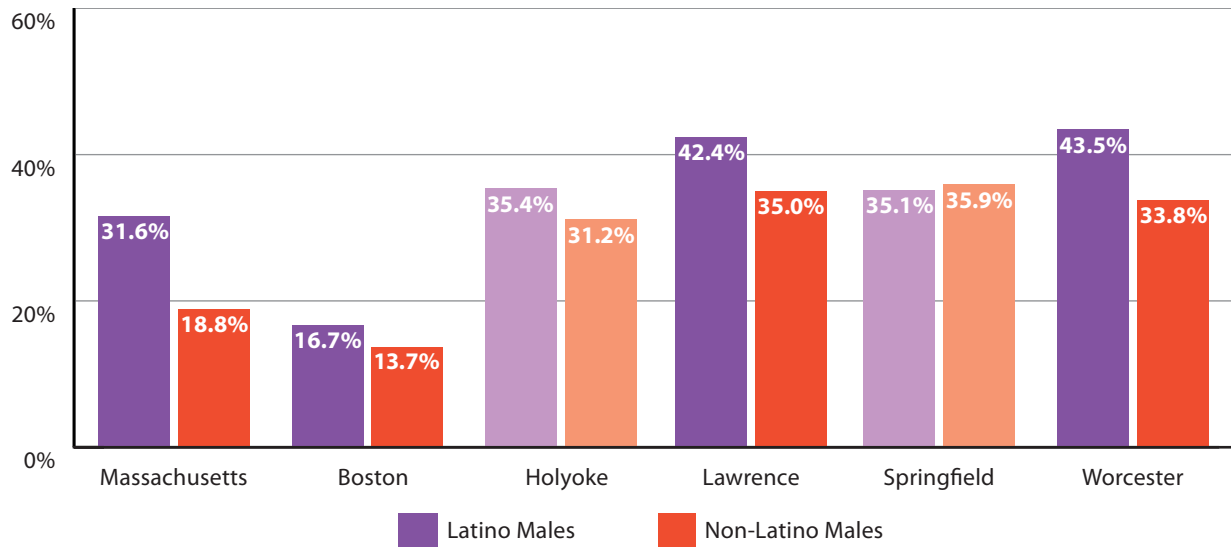
FIGURE 29A & B

## 12th Grade Males' Reported Plans after High School Graduation

### 4 YEAR COLLEGE



### 2 YEAR COLLEGE



Source: MA DESE SIMS data, male students enrolled in 12th grade in 2010–11 through 2013–14 school years. This is a survey of students' expected paths. Faded colors signify no significant difference between Latino and non-Latino populations. The response rates are 84.2% for non-Latino students and 69.3% for Latino students in Mass.

do so within the first two years of high school. In other words, they are out of the potential college pool before the last two years of high school when college exploration and decision making begins in earnest. By far, the majority of study participant narratives told of the difficulties, deficiencies, and obstacles they encountered in and outside of K–12

school that had the combined effect of blocking the path, in one way or another, out of high school and into college.

### Feelings of Resignation

Unfortunately, one of the most common themes voiced by the young Latino men interviewed

with regard to school were feelings of outright resignation. These feelings were fueled by a variety of factors, perhaps the most significant being that they learn at an early age that they often have to prove—to teachers and to themselves—that they are indeed worthy of investment in academic settings. When young men discover early on that they do not automatically “belong” in school—e.g., they are not expected to be at the top of their class; they are not expected to be well behaved; they are not expected to go on to college and become highly successful via traditional educational pathways—the temptation to give up and resign to others’ low expectations of them becomes harder to resist.

### Better Things to Do: Fun and Coolness

Several interviewees expressed that, generally starting in middle school, they decided to pursue non-academic interests because they were “more fun,” more interesting, or simply had significance to their lives. As a Springfield student named Felipe put it,

*Kids just wanted to have fun, they wanted to skip, they wanted to do “bad stuff” . . . swearing, stealing, doing all this stupid stuff, and I’m like, alright.*

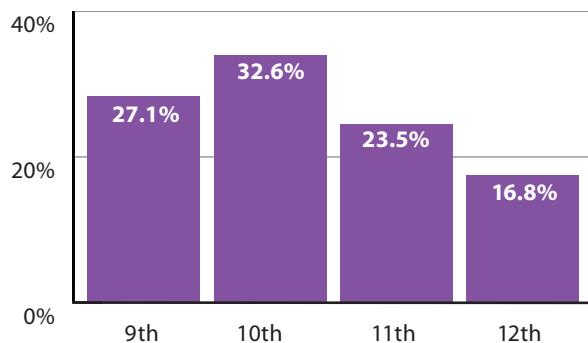
Talking about sex at a young age, Miguel from Lawrence said he lost his virginity in middle school,

*We were moving a little too fast, you know? I am not gonna lie. It wasn’t even with like a girl who I was with for like a year or like in a relationship. That’s just the way it was, you know? Like we were dogs out here.*

A different Springfield student named Dante said that his peers as early as middle school were more interested in doing drugs, having sex, and skipping class than they were in school. Dante had moved from Florida where he described himself as a fairly rule-abiding and high-performing young man who had never skipped class before his arrival in Springfield. Nevertheless, it was not long into high school before he started to do drugs himself, first marijuana and then cocaine. His grades were “horrible, horrible, like Fs, Ds.” And he “used to fall asleep in classes.” Dante said

FIGURE 30

### Grade When Latino Male Dropouts Leave School



Source: MA DESE SIMS data, male Latino students in 9th grade in the five urban areas in the 2006–07 through 2009–10 school years that ultimately drop out.

he knew no one who was studying. He eventually stopped going to school altogether: “I was just not about it [school].” Dante unfortunately ended up homeless, relying on romantic relationships with women to ensure a place to sleep and a modicum of stability. Now a father, he recently got his HSED at Roca, a community-based organization geared to transforming the lives of at-risk youth in order to stop the poverty-to-incarceration cycle.

A closely related theme in the young men’s narratives running alongside the desire to stray from academics and have fun was the need to be perceived as cool, which prompted a few different actions. For one, there was a desire to be with friends in school no matter where they were. Whom the young men counted among their friends and their loyalty to them were important parts of the formula to be cool. Accordingly, some young men from Worcester pointed out it was common enough that if a person was in in-house suspension, his friend would intentionally act out to be sent there, too. Variations on this theme, such as young men’s hanging out with girls rather than focusing on school or intentionally breaking school rules because they “thought it would be cool to be out of school,” came up across the research sites. As a young man from Springfield named Ricardo noted, “They thought it was the cool thing to do or

[mockingly] 'I'm big and bad now because I am not going to school.'" And in Holyoke, "To be cool," Francisco explained,

*Was like, smoke weed, and you wear your father's pants and brother's shirt that looks crazy on you . . . and skip school. There was times where people would skip school to go to the arcade, [which] would open at 11. You started school at seven, so people would sit around and probably looking like bums 'til the arcade opened at 11.*

Additionally, this activity had a flip-side, too, because, as a Springfield student named Joel related, it gave the troublemaker the ground from which to call out and bully those who followed the rules: "You're a loser," they would say, and "things like that." When these moments occurred, classroom instruction would come to a standstill or was at least interrupted to deal with the troublesome students, which led to feelings of frustration and resignation from students who wanted to be there and teachers who saw their class time wasted.

### **School Climate: Lack of Connection to School Staff**

A number of men interviewed for this study perceived lack of connection to school staff, a fact that only exacerbates feelings of not having a rightful place in school and temptations to stray from a path toward academic success. On the one hand, young men said they would have liked more attention from teachers to ensure the outright enforcement of rules to 1) keep them in check and on track, and 2) keep order in the classroom. This often went along with frustration they were feeling from outbursts and disruptions as described above. One Springfield student named Vicente noted about his middle school experience, there "wasn't order." He continued,

*Kids were disrespectful, doing whatever they wanted. The bell wouldn't be regarded as anything. They said it was open season, pretty much. Just walk around, pretty much. Some of them would do things on purpose to get suspended . . . [because] they thought it would be cool to be out of school.*

He concluded, "It was horrible." On the other hand, the young men noted they desired more of the personal contact and attention they associated with elementary school, a certain amount of protecting and even coddling, that they thought had quickly evaporated in middle school without much explanation. A young man from Springfield named Sam drew a distinction between how discipline was handled in a public school by citing the difference in class sizes in a charter school. But his comments also spoke to the closer relationship among students and teachers in small classrooms: "Charter school was completely different. It was structured, smaller classes. I had like, what, 10, 12 kids in my class. It was one-on-one." According to the young men's narratives, there were simply fewer avenues to get away with misbehaving in smaller classes, which preserved the integrity of the learning time and spaces, and allowed students to be more connected to their teachers. One student in Lawrence named Mauricio even claimed that he more or less used the disciplinary system to focus attention onto himself as early as middle school. Being something of the class clown, he was often in trouble, but this put him in touch with the administration frequently in such a way that,

*Everybody knew me from the principal to the security guards and they were all, like, "Stop getting in trouble, you know, you're a good kid..." I think everybody was lookin' out for me.*

Even in high school, there were glimpses of how students longed for authentic connections with teachers to help them succeed along their paths and/or to establish safe, distraction-free learning environments. Ivan from Lawrence, thankful for the impact his HLC (High School Learning Center) teacher made on him, nevertheless confessed about most of his teachers there,

*I feel like they see it in me, but they really can't do nothing 'cause I'm not like their child or, you get me? They can only do so much.*

Alejandro from Worcester, who went to a small public high school, remembered it was a positive experience for him because,

*I liked the way the teachers spoke. They didn't talk down to you. Like, you were at eye level with them, which I kind of liked.*

Unlike his large elementary school, he liked the small high school because “the teachers actually created a relationship with you.” Manuel was from a Springfield school where he even knew the principal and felt that teachers recognized and acknowledged he was smart, which led him to conclude that, in that sense, he “was fortunate.” Yet he also claimed that because he was smart,

*My classmates didn't get along with me; I was bullied a lot.*

The idea that students longed for more faculty contact is an area where the previous and proceeding sections of this report overlap tremendously and help deepen our understanding of young Latino men's experiences. Part of the young men's perspectives is influenced by the operations and attitudes of families, specifically the impulse to mollycoddle, described in the “Families” section. In short, the desire to be protected and nurtured by an extended family, while not exclusively a Latino value, is nevertheless heightened in Latino communities. Interestingly, it shows up most frequently as a desired relationship in the young men's lives just as relationships are starting to change in their school experience: when they often move to a new building, with new students from other areas of their cities, and begin learning in a different, “more adult” way—that is, in middle school. It was at this point in their lives, in fact, when most of the young men noted that everything started to change in school. At the same time, these are crucial adolescent years punctuated with peer pressure and the identity-formation that goes on around middle-school age, which is detailed more comprehensively in the subsequent section on peers. Making one's mark, defining one's position in the student social hierarchies at school and in neighborhoods, and establishing an identity of one's own apart from family are long-standing and virtually indelible traits of early adolescence across cultural groups. That they are mentioned at this point in the young men's lives is not surprising.

Another factor to consider is the low representation of Latinos among the school faculty and administration in the five research sites. Other studies, particularly a recent study on young black and Latino males, report that the relatively low number of Latino educators in schools leaves few options for students to feel connected to school teaching staff.<sup>84</sup> Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data shows (see **Figure 31**) that while over 94% of the Latino public high school males in the five urban areas have at least one Latino teacher in their school, the ratio of Latino teachers to Latino males is not favorable. In Springfield and Worcester, 0.0% of Latino males have at least one Latino teacher per 100 students. For Boston and Holyoke, 42.7% and 33.7% of Latino males have at least one Latino teacher per 100 students.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has highlighted increasing diversity of teachers as a priority. The Department launched a Diversity Initiative and convened a group of experts for a Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education Task Force which provided a set of recommendations for how to more effectively recruit and retain a diverse workforce and for developing cultural proficiency among school staff.

While it was infrequently noted that a dearth of Latino teachers had an impact on their lives, the narratives offered by the young men detail again and again, and in many different contexts, moments when having authority figures who shared a cultural background and an interest in their lives may help keep them on a college-bound track, particularly in larger schools.

This theme was also explored in previous reports about Worcester.<sup>85</sup> Although researchers for this study recognize the problem of a numerical shortage of trained Latino teachers in Massachusetts, the qualitative data here supports the conclusion that more representative faculty members and administrators in schools may well lead to greater success for Latino students. At several different points during this study, young men spoke of a significant scarcity of positive Latino role models, whether in the media, positions of authority, or

FIGURE 31

### Percent of Latino HS Males with Latino Teachers in Their Schools

	At Least One Latino Teacher in School	At Least One Latino Teacher per 500 Students in School	At Least One Latino Teacher per 100 Students in School	At Least One Latino Teacher per 50 Students in School
Massachusetts	84.7%	68.3%	14.5%	4.8%
Boston	98.9%	98.9%	42.7%	6.0%
Holyoke	100.0%	100.0%	33.7%	0.0%
Lawrence	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	53.0%
Springfield	94.9%	94.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Worcester	100.0%	82.6%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: MA DESE SIMS data, high school males, 2012–13 school year and MA EPIMS teacher data. These calculations are based on full-time equivalent teacher hours, so, two half-time Latino teachers would be counted as one full-time Latino teacher. Schools serving only grades 9–12 with at least 100 students are included in the sample. Alternative, collaborative, and special education schools are excluded.

their own communities. Better representation in schools could provide the young men with the positive role models they crave and allow them to form student-teacher relationships with adults of similar cultural backgrounds, which, in turn, may mitigate some of the resignation.

It is also important to note that there was something paradoxical in all this as well. Students longed for more mentor relationships and fewer class distractions but many of the actions reported in the young men’s narratives, actions prompted by students wanting to “have fun” or “be cool,” actively worked against both desires. But one has to wonder, if classroom dynamics were more conducive to learning and teacher-student relationships were less fraught for these men, might coolness and fun be less associated with skipping classes and getting in trouble in order to spend time with friends? Also, to be fair, there were stories in which young men claimed they actively avoided trouble either because of their own senses of drive and purpose, or, more commonly, because of the expectations of their families. For those who did not stay the academic course, though, those who might have disrupted classes, actions often came with short-term consequences such as reporting to the administration, extra homework,

suspension, and expulsion. But, the young men also described other forces at work beyond immediate punishments that compromised their educations and dogged them for years after high school as they told of practices of labeling and tracking.

### The Power of Labeling: No Second Chances

Acknowledging that they made “bad” decisions, many of the young men in all research sites talked less about isolated decisions and more about the cumulative and compounding effects that the decisions they made had on their lives while in and beyond school. They spoke about being labeled for a variety of reasons, not always based on their personal decisions, and how difficult it was to shed labels once they had been associated with them. When they could not modify or erase these labels, young men often spoke of a “whatever” or a “why bother” attitude in school. David from Lawrence remembered,

*They kind of degraded us in, like, the bad and the dumb kids towards the good and the smart kids.... And we went through that from like sixth to seventh grade ... like, “these were the smart kids, these were the good kids,” “these were the bad kids, the dumb kids.”*

Placed among the “bad kid” group, David rejected the label on some level but nevertheless acquiesced to it: “I was pretty smart, but I just didn’t like to participate. I just didn’t care.” The young men also told of how labels followed them throughout the rest of their time in school and of how many students internalized their meaning. A Springfield young man named Esteban put it this way while recalling his own academic performance,

*I get straight As in English, right? But then I would fail math. I sucked at it, [and] the teacher didn’t help me. So, ever since then, I just thought I was bad at math and then it starts sticking to you.*

Esteban carried the aversion to math into his young adulthood when he got a job working in politics in which he realized he was not bad at math at all.

Looking closely at the narratives, researchers were able to divide the labels that were given to the young men into two broad categories: “Underachievers,” which involves tracking and standardized testing, and “Troublemakers” and “Bad Kids.”

### **“Underachievers:” Tracking and Standardized Testing**

A common theme in the young men’s narratives was that they personally had been labeled or they had seen how labels were attached to others as a result of performance in class, on standardized tests, and/or through a tracking system.<sup>86</sup> Standardized testing, in fact, surfaced repeatedly as one of those factors that led people to resign themselves to a particular life outcome they could not change. On one hand was the perception of tests such as Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and, far less frequently the SATs, as high-stakes tests that they saw as meaning little in their lives but that were nevertheless pitched to them as make-or-break moments. As one Springfield young man named Luis commented, the stress and pressure is tremendous as early as the seventh and eighth grades because students were told, “If you don’t pass this, you’re not graduating.” Calling them “just so pointless,” Javier from Holyoke said,

*They’re just trying to put people on a chart. “This is where you fall” and that’s it. That all they care about is their little stats. It’s kind of insulting.*

Some young men noted that the preparation for the test did not lead to much knowledge. As a Holyoke student named Marcos put it:

*They rushed through the materials, like, the teachers. If it was math, you’d be learning something one day and then the next day you come in and you’re learning something else. You miss two or three days of school [because you were sick] and you’re completely lost, you know? So, they never gave you time to internalize everything they teach you.*

In short, there were many insightful reasons students objected to it—the narratives were not simply, “I hate tests.”

On the other hand, many young men reported that standardized testing had a devastating impact on their sense of self-worth, often because of what the results supposedly said about the test-takers. Ángel from Springfield admitted, “It was very discouraging when you fail it. . . . I know I was discouraged.” Subjects often related that these were tests and therefore the institutions repeatedly told them they were inadequate if they failed them. Another young man from Springfield named Juan said,

*You would be indoctrinated into the fact that we were less than everybody else because we’re not good enough. . . . None of us believe in ourselves and it all started with standardized testing.*

Another Springfield student named Samuel, in talking about how the MCAS affected him and how he saw his future, contended,

*The self-worth goes down. You’ve got that mentality “I am never gonna pass the MCAS. No matter how much I study, I’m not gonna f\*\*king pass the SATs.” So you adopt this “f\*\*k it” attitude that goes hand-in-hand with smoking weed and chilling and all that.*

This was particularly problematic because the young men felt caught in something of a self-defeating cycle as it applied to academics. As

above, some narratives noted that students were not well-prepared for standardized tests because of the pacing classrooms had to be on, which led to resignation. If you missed material,

*You try to ask another kid for help, all they're gonna tell you is to copy it because they don't have time to help you because they're trying to stay [up with the material]. . . . So, when you're on the test, it doesn't matter because you're like, "What was that?"*

The test results come back and, many young men reported, they did not always do well. They were sorted into categories such as "Needs Improvement," "Warning," or "Failing." They were discouraged and regularly reminded where they placed on the tests. While this reinforced stereotypes that were hard to get past or counteract, it also created a situation in which they felt inadequate because their scores were not high enough. Sometimes men tried to improve, particularly if they had strong family support networks, peers who would reinforce the need for academic success, and/or a mentor watching out for them at their school. However, more frequently, the young men reported repeatedly doing poorly on these sorts of tests, which led to apathy and feelings of resignation. As many of the young men saw it, "So, why bother?" At least one young man, Alejandro from Boston, adopted a similar approach toward other test-taking moments in his life. Wanting to be a U.S. Marine since middle school, he took a written test going into his senior year but did poorly on it. Rather than thinking, "What do I need to improve?", he came away from the test thinking the Marines were more than he could handle. The test had become an obstacle to success and not a measure of what one needs to know to succeed.

Sometimes these labels would appear in the form of tracking. Young men from all the study areas referred to what they saw as informal and formal tracking systems in their schools. Often it was as simple as being in the "smart" classes—honors, AP, college prep—and the average or lower-level classes. One Springfield young man named Pedro drew the distinction in his own life,

*I wasn't in the smart classes; I was in the average classes.*

He went on to explain that those who were in more advanced classes were seen as better than those who were not, and people would often talk about which students were in what level of classes. Other times, these distinctions were perceived as more elaborate. Gabe from Lawrence claimed that students were divided randomly into colors at his middle school, but eventually one group would be identified as "smart" and the others as "dumb." He claimed the "smart kids" were the "good kids" and the "dumb kids" were the "bad kids." Another Lawrence young man named Andres made a similar assessment in describing a program in this school system this way,

*It's basically saying, "Alright, we're gonna put you over here because you're on that side," you get me? . . . so basically, all the bad kids or people who didn't go to school as much as the others, they went [there].*

In all places where this kind of labeling was reported young men expressed frustration and contempt because they remembered internalizing it to a point. Andres said,

*They would let you know who was the dumb-asses and who wasn't. Like, your teachers would make you feel like you were dumb-asses.*

Meanwhile, across the state, a Springfield young man named Eduardo acknowledged a similar situation there:

*'Cause if they're saying, "Oh, he's in the slow class," oh, well, I'm in the slow class 'cause I'm dumb.*

These narratives suggest that the young men felt labeled as underachievers around late elementary/early middle school, which then in turn impacted the rigor of their classes, their expectations for themselves, their teacher's expectations, and their attitudes toward schooling. To investigate this story of labeling, low expectations, and tracking, we analyzed the link between low academic performance in elementary and middle school



grades with high school outcomes. If students who perform poorly on the MCAS in an early grade experience lower expectations, labeling, and tracking, we would expect MCAS outcomes in third through eighth grade to be highly correlated with high school outcomes. Put another way, the narratives of these young Latino men suggest that those who score below Proficient on MCAS in elementary school will be less likely than their peers to score above Proficient in 10th grade.<sup>87</sup>

To test this, researchers estimate the correlation between third through eighth grade MCAS scores on reaching 10th grade proficiency in math and English language arts (ELA). We control for all observable characteristics and conduct the analysis for all male students in Massachusetts.<sup>88</sup> (See the technical appendix for a full explanation.) **Figure 32** shows these estimated correlations. We find that students who score Warning or below Proficient (Warning or Needs Improvement) in math or ELA in third through eighth grade reach proficiency in 10th grade significantly less than their peers.<sup>89</sup>

For example, students with a Warning score on third grade math MCAS reached 10th grade proficiency 34% less than did students who scored higher (controlling for observable characteristics). This relationship grows with each grade: Those scoring Warning on fourth grade math reach 10th grade proficiency 39% less and this grows for fifth (43%), sixth (50%), seventh (52%), and eighth (56%). Similarly for ELA MCAS, performing below Proficient in earlier grades is increasingly correlated with scoring below Proficient in 10th grade. Those who score below Proficient in third grade ELA reach 10th grade proficiency 11% less and this grows for fifth (15%), sixth (18%), seventh (27%), and eighth (34%).

Furthermore, we find that these relationships are significantly stronger for Latino males than non-Latino males. This means that Latino males are less likely than non-Latino males to improve their academic performance after a low MCAS score in early grades. While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the reason for this difference, some potential areas to investigate could include

differences in tracking or class placement across ethnic groups and differences in teacher, parent, and student responses and expectations after below Proficient MCAS scores.

### **“Troublemakers” and “Bad Kids”**

Many of the interviews with young men from all five research sites made both generalized and specific references to classroom disruptions, lack of respect, and outright violent episodes during school and class. Some of the disturbances, as we have seen, were designed to trigger the discipline system in order to effect some result ranging from increased personal attention to suspension to being with friends or to be perceived as cool. But whatever the reason behind the disruptions—or the disrespect and violence, for that matter—many young men report earning reputations as “troublemakers” or “bad kids” as a result. In turn, these reputations often followed them for years, affecting their school experiences and closing future pathways to them at an early age.

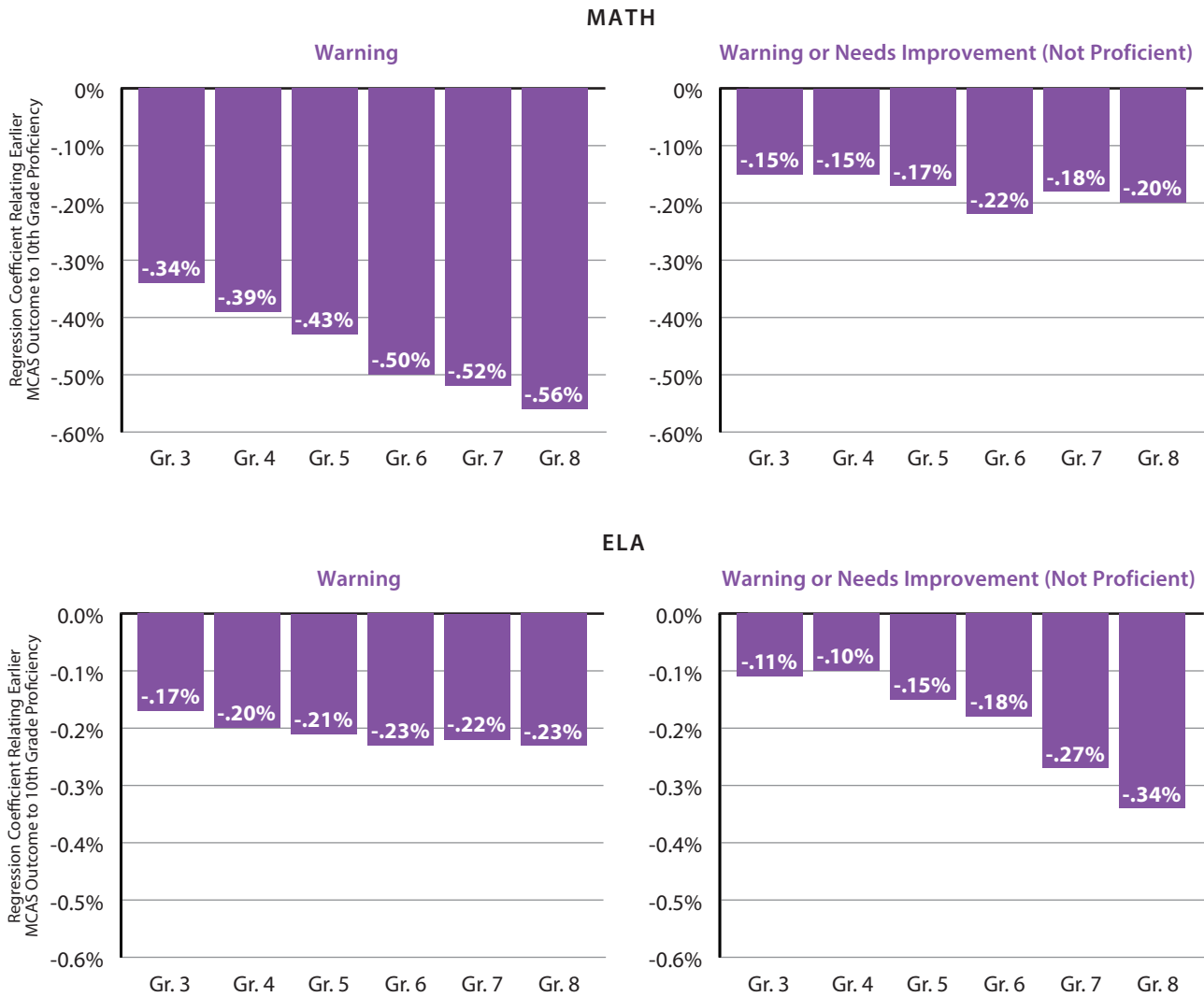
At a basic level, a student who disturbed classes in middle school lost academic time as a result of his actions, which, while it was precisely his goal, nevertheless might have resulted in his missing out on important lessons necessary for performing well in the class. Diego from Springfield described being labeled a troublemaker this way,

*The teachers were already frustrated with other students and then one person messes up.... They'll get aggravated, you know. Probably to someone who did nothing wrong ... or they single you out; they have a target. Or the kid comes back [from the bathroom] and they're like, "I don't want you here. You looked at me wrong, get out." ... He kept singling me out like, "No, I don't want him in my class" ... from that point on, he was like, "Whatever he says ..." the moment I mess up, "You're out."*

Suspension compounds the problem even more. In the case of Worcester, for example, where in academic year (AY) 2012–2013 Latinos comprised 38% of the overall student body, they accounted for 53% of the out-of-school suspensions, which led

FIGURE 32

## Relation Between Scoring below Proficient on MCAS in Early Grades and Reaching Proficiency for Math and ELA in 10th Grade



Source: MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data, male students enrolled in 3rd grade in 2005–06 or 2006–07 who took both the ELA and math MCAS in grades 3–8 and grade 10. These graphs plot the regression coefficient of regressing whether the student reaches proficiency in math and ELA in 10th grade on whether the student had a Warning score (or Warning of Needs Improvement) on math and whether the student had a Warning score on ELA in an earlier grade (specified by the X axis). Controls include year in 3rd grade, school attended in 3rd grade, and a set of 3rd-grade student demographics including race and ethnicity, gender, free/reduced lunch status, special education, English language learner, and immigrant. All regression coefficients are significant at the 1% level. For math, each grade’s regression coefficient is significantly different from the prior grade (i.e., the coefficient of -0.39 for grade 4 is significantly larger than the coefficient of -0.34 for grade 3). For ELA, this is also true except there is no significant difference between grades 4 and 5 or between grades 6 and 7 for Warning.

to considerable lost class time.<sup>90</sup> **Figure 33** shows the suspensions from all five research areas and Massachusetts overall for AY 2011–2012 and Latino suspensions are particularly high. Missing class time might inhibit young men’s success on tests, which would lead to lower grades on report cards. In turn, this could mean dropping to lower levels of instruction and lower GPAs, thereby closing the doors of some colleges to them or removing them entirely from a college-bound track. To be fair, many of the young men readily acknowledged and owned up to making what they saw as “dumb” mistakes, but they also claimed they found it difficult to reverse the “troublemaker” or “bad kid” labels. Moreover, some of their narratives speak to other means whereby they could be labeled. Put more simply, young men from all five research sites spoke extensively about how reputations they earned, rightly or wrongly, placed their futures in jeopardy.

School violence actually emerged frequently in the young men’s interviews. Interestingly, however, school violence was not simply a matter of classroom disruption. It was also used 1) to describe at what point order began to break down in a person’s K–12 experience, and 2) to make a point about an emerging climate of fear in schools, particularly among faculty because it led to strained relationships with students. In fact, students from each of the research sites reported that middle school was when students really began to misbehave, although the misbehaving continued into high school, particularly in the early years there. In rare cases, violent episodes were observable even before middle school. One of these exceptions came up in a Lawrence focus group:

*We were in fifth grade, and I remember this dude, like, came in crazy one day because, you know, they beat him up. This dude came with a mallet and just whacked him over the head. Like, whacked him, whacked him. One of our friends tackled him, you know, ‘cause we were just like, we didn’t know what was going on. Obviously you start to know little things like that, start to get worse and worse.*

Clearly, there was some element of retributive violence involved here, suggesting that either

inside or outside of school there had been a previous exchange that led to this point. And while it must have made a considerable stir that day, the young men remembering it did not recall it as a watershed moment for school discipline. Rather, they remembered it as a moment when violent episodes in school began to get worse in their lives. In fact, while a student said he had some fond memories in those middle school years (apart from the mallet incident), it “was probably the last time that I remember having fun, like, ever having like genuine fun” because “it starts to get serious around the seventh grade.”

These moments and others like it, even if they were not quite as violent, appear to have had an impact on adults in the same institutions. Many of the young men spoke of teachers being palpably frustrated and how some had what they called “anger management problems.” Young men from Lawrence told of teachers losing their tempers with students, screaming at students, slamming their own heads against windows and desks, kicking desks over, and worse. One Lawrence student named Robert recalled an incident when he was in middle school in this way:

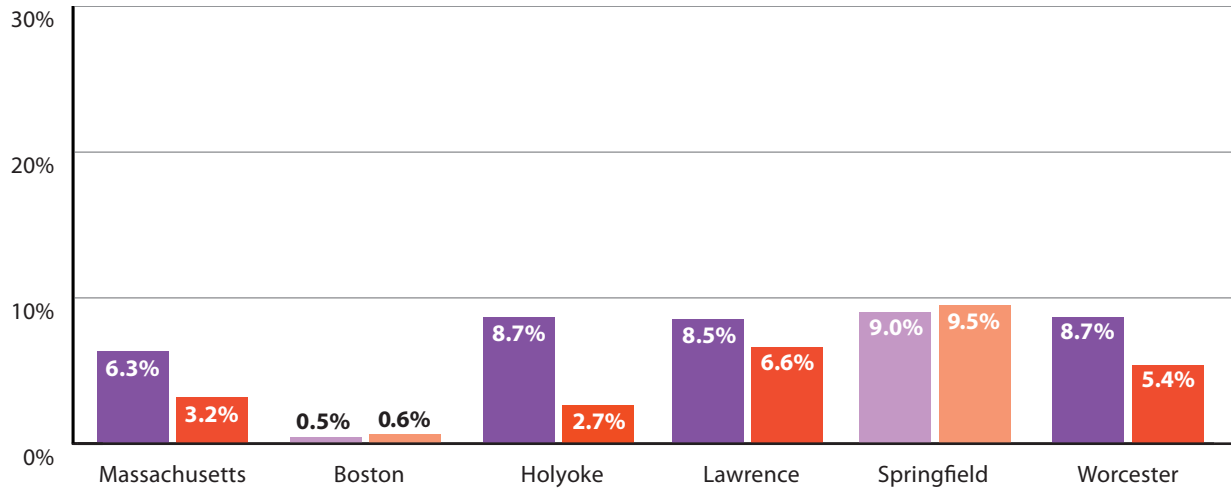
*I remember like, one time, I was walking in the hallway and I was with my brother. We were walking, you know, down the hallway, and we saw one of our friends being choked by one of the teachers. Physically, like, choking him. And we’re just like, “What the f\*\*\*?” Like we go to run and like one of the other teachers tackled him and was telling him, “They’re only kids! . . . They’re only kids.”*

That this left an indelible mark is evident because this particular story, remembered years later, began with a regular refrain: “Seventh grade changed me a lot, maturity-wise.” Sergio from Springfield reported that he hated his two years in the public middle school because he felt it was too congested and that the teachers did not care about the students. His mother had been involved with the school, too, as a member of the parent-teacher board, but he nevertheless left the district system to go to a charter school.

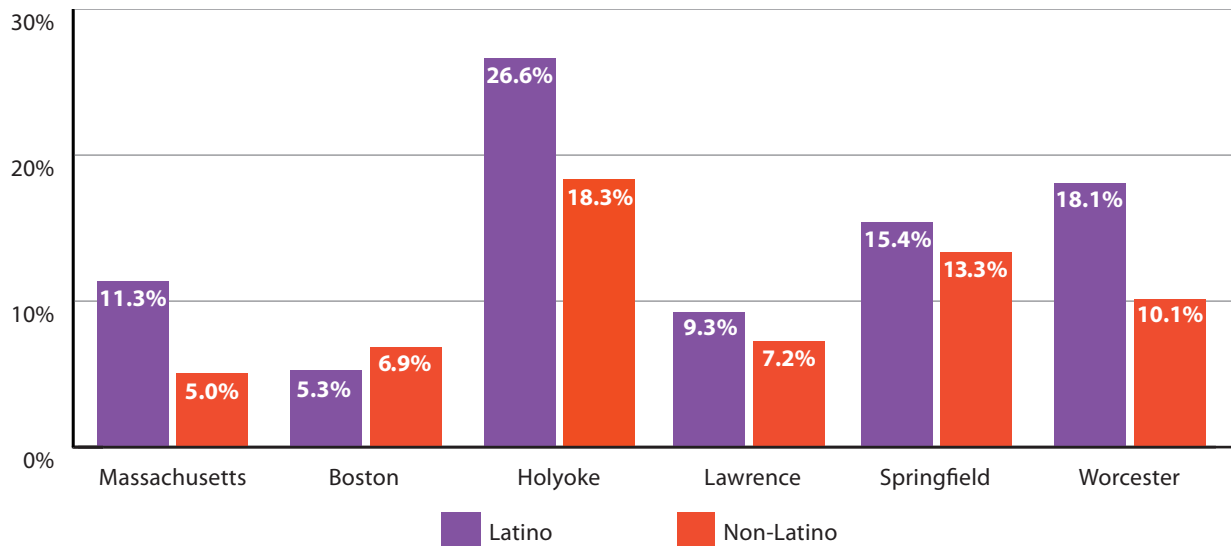
FIGURE 33

### Percent of Male Students with at Least One Suspension

#### IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION



#### OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION



Source: MA DESE SIMS data, percent of male students in the 2011–12 school year to receive any suspensions. Faded colors signify no significant difference between Latino and non-Latino populations.

The young men interviewed talked a good deal about frustration and fear, in terms of how these feelings affected them directly as well as indirectly by way of a generally tense school climate. Lucas from Springfield, recognizing the chain of events that led him to being kicked out of school, struck an empathetic tone in discussing the circumstances around his readmission to school: "I tried to go back to high school, but they said that since I had gun charges, they didn't want to let me in. That was around the time when the schools, the teachers, everybody was getting stabbed and all that stuff." Not being re-admitted, he got his HSED in time. The young men also reported stories of violence involving faculty members losing their cool. According to the narratives of the young men, disruptive classes frustrated faculty members, some so profoundly that the accumulation of their frustration and the lack of support they experienced led to serious outbursts. One of the Lawrence young men who witnessed the choking incident above spoke about his personal attitude toward teachers who resorted to taking aggressive measures in an attempt to regain control, a reality that could understandably prompt fear in faculty members:

*He never really acted a fool with me... 'cause I knew that if he would have took it to that level,... I would have fought with him. Yeah, I would have definitely fought with him because that's how it was where I lived. Like, you don't take shit, no matter how old you are.... If they don't respect us, what do you expect? For us to be on our knees, to "OK, Sir?"*

Particularly against stories such as this one, fear experienced by faculty and administrations is understandable and, in fact, recognized by both sides in different studies.<sup>91</sup> However, it clearly had an observably negative impact on school and classroom culture that affected education quality, mutual respect, and led to labeling students as "troublemakers," "bad kids," and even "dangerous."

This kind of labeling also spilled over into other areas. The young men interviewed frequently claimed that teachers' attitudes toward them,

described most often as "disrespect," contributed to their own negative experiences in school and deepened their apathetic dispositions toward education years before higher education was on the horizon. Some students pointed out the irony of their treatment in middle school after the lessons they learned in elementary school years earlier. As one young man saw it, teachers in middle school should follow "what they taught us in the first grade: Treat us how you want to be treated."

Some of the men's narratives around labeling reveal how school staff would not only label individuals but entire groups of men. A young man from Lawrence named Jorge said,

*They would say, they would tell us, like, "I could tell like half you guys are probably not even going to graduate high school, like, that you ain't even gonna make it."*

Other students noted that teachers and administrators knew them through their older brothers or other relatives and made judgments about them sight unseen. Some noted they knew "where we lived" and assumed things about them because of their addresses. And the various stereotypes tended to follow them through their school careers, making them difficult to shake.

These moments were particularly frustrating for many of the young men because it denied who they were as individuals while assuming teachers already knew who they were, but also because it did not give them a chance to impress teachers on their own or shake a label assigned to them that no longer fit the reality. Many claimed they knew why they were there. They may not have liked it, but they knew what it meant to have an education and it was hard to stick with it when it was made so difficult for them. As one young man from Lawrence told it:

*Those teachers would put you down in a sense, they're like, "You ain't shit. You haven't seen the real world." And I'm like, one time, you know, I got mad ... I'm like "F\*\*k you know about my life? F\*\*k you know what we go through?... You're not going home turning on the lights seeing cockroaches*

*on the floor, you're not going home to ... a cold house ... you're not living how I'm living. You don't know how I live. You should be happy I'm even here." ... I never was a school person but I had to do it enough to just pass 'cause I knew that's what you needed to survive in this country. You need at least a high school education to somewhat survive—even if it's mediocre.*

But they expressed incredible frustration at their inability to transcend the labels affixed to them, even when they were actively trying to change their circumstances by intentionally changing peer groups or trying to earn better grades. Jose from Springfield claimed that people would always bring up past mistakes and involvements like selling drugs and never give them a chance. "Oh, this guy used to distribute heroin to the kids!" This discourages a lot of people from moving up." He claimed, "They're always gonna see me as a f\*\*kup, so I might as well just stay in these waters." Stereotyping young men as "bad kids" early in life, then, can have an enormous impact on their future paths.

## High School Performance and College Preparation

The gap in high school performance, SAT, and AP Exams for Latino and non-Latino males shows Latinos lag in preparation for high school graduation and college. In Massachusetts public schools, reaching proficiency or higher on the 10th grade math and ELA MCAS is a requirement for meeting competency determination for graduation. If the student does not score Proficient or higher, then they need to fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan to graduate high school. As shown in **Figure 34**, Latino males reach competency at a lower rate than non-Latino males in each of the urban areas. They also qualify for the Adams Scholarship (also determined by 10th grade MCAS performance), which provides a tuition waiver at Massachusetts public colleges or universities, at a significantly lower rate than non-Latino males.

In addition to lower performance on the 10th grade MCAS, which impacts the path to high school

graduation and available financial resources for college, Latino males take the SAT and AP exams at a significantly lower rate than non-Latino males. **Figure 35** shows that 40% of Latino males took the SAT and the rate was lower in Holyoke (20%), Lawrence (28%), Springfield (34%), and Worcester (34%). The proportion of Latino males taking at least one AP exam is also lower across the board, with only 7% in Holyoke ranging to 28% in Boston. These statistics look at those who reach the 12th grade, but 12% of Latino males who enrolled in ninth grade in these five study areas drop out, compared to a rate of 8.8% for non-Latino males.<sup>92</sup>

Beyond attrition, though, there are fewer Latino young men who are prepared to score well on the exams and/or who feel prepared to navigate the college application process. A survey of more than 135 Latino men in the study areas who were in or had completed college showed that only 11% reported that they felt "very well prepared" or "extremely well prepared" while 27% reported they were "not prepared at all."<sup>93</sup> These are the students who successfully navigate the college application and test-taking system and arrive at institutions of higher learning. What of those who do not know the system? What of those who do not know to apply?

Difficulty in graduating from high school also impedes post-secondary attainment. **Figure 36** details the four- and five-year high school graduation rates of Latino and non-Latino males in each of the urban areas. Latino males graduate from high school at a significantly lower rate than non-Latino males. Of the Latino males who attend school in these areas in ninth grade, 60% in Boston, 54% in Holyoke, 57% in Lawrence, 58% in Springfield, and 73% in Worcester graduated from high school in four years.

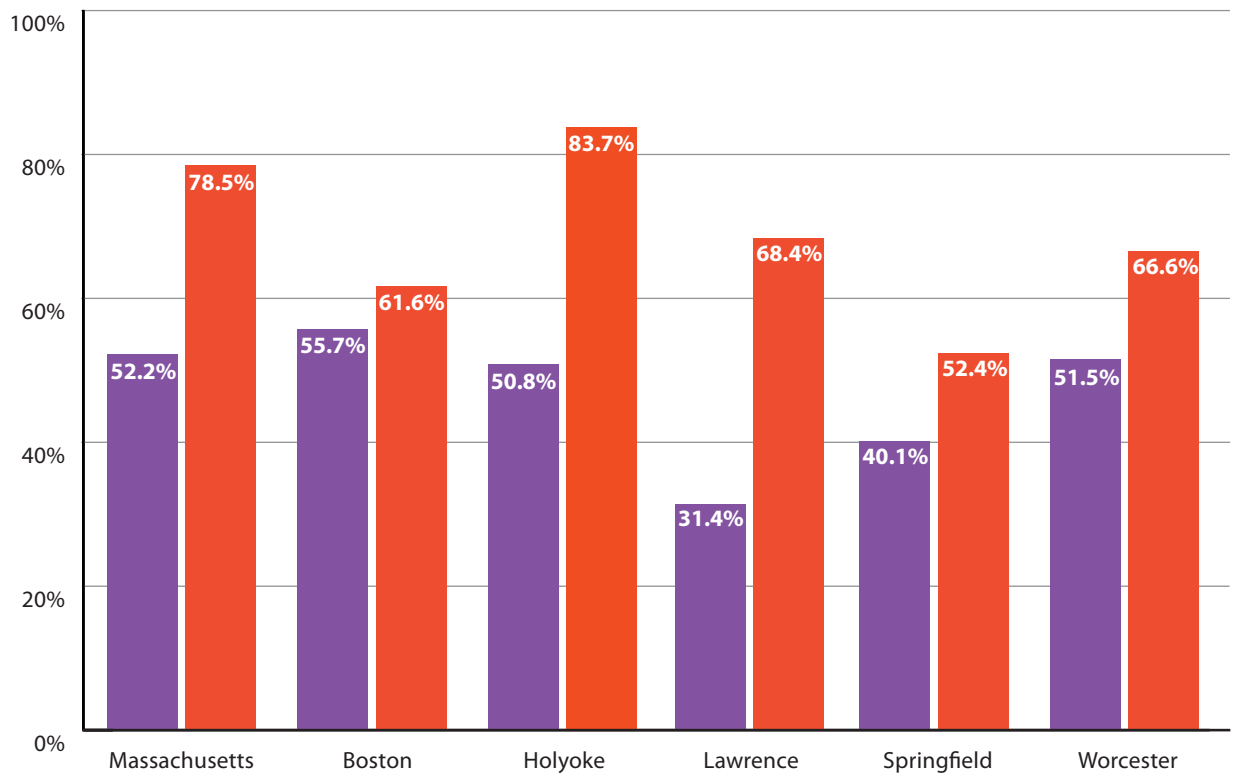
## The Road to College

Many of the young men interviewed reported that their schools devoted very little time to helping them plan for the future, a reality that clearly affected their pathways to higher education. This spoke to a more systemic problem: They had no

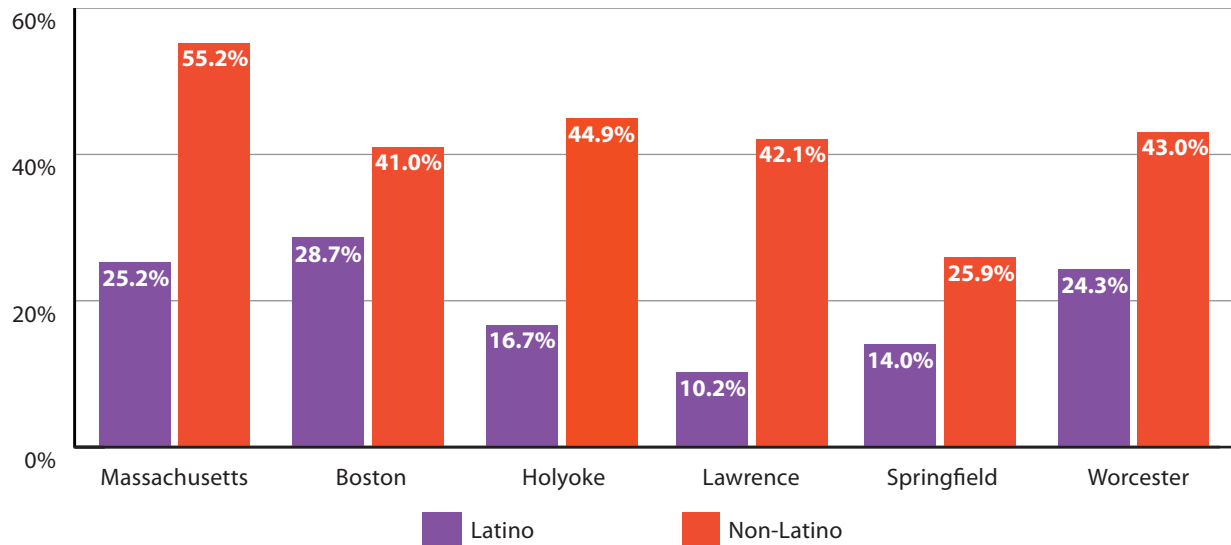
FIGURE 34

## Competency Determination & Adams Scholarship

### MEETS COMPETENCY FOR GRADUATION



### ELIGIBLE FOR ADAMS SCHOLARSHIP

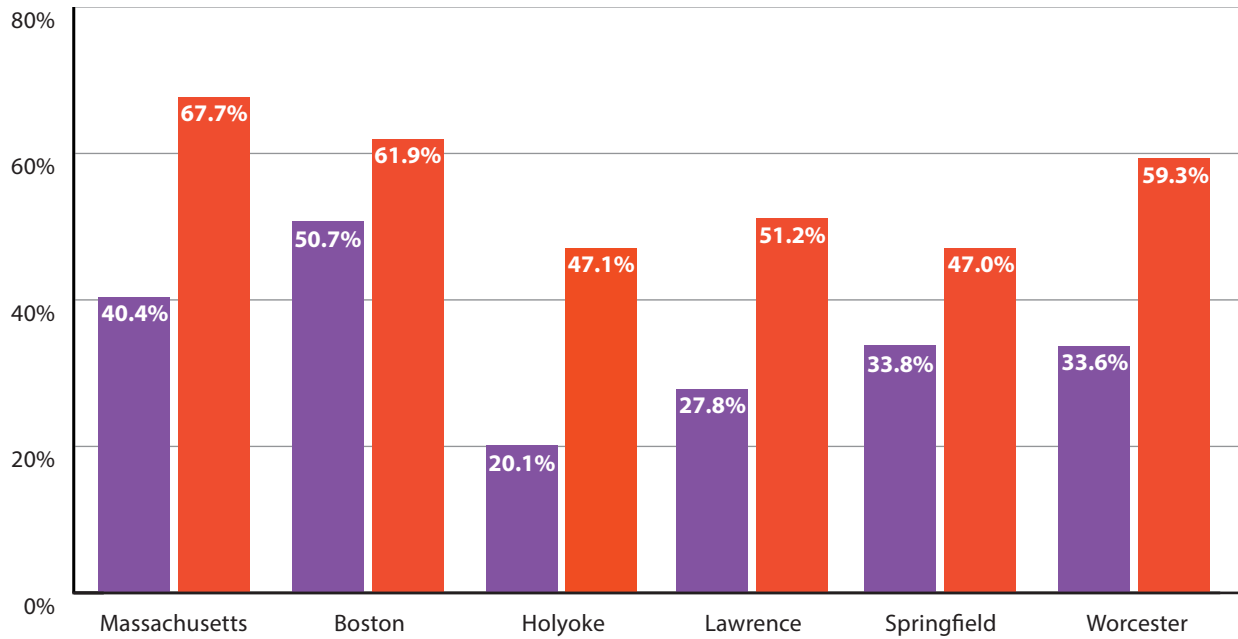


Source: MA DESE SIMS and MCAS data, male students in the 2012–13 school year.

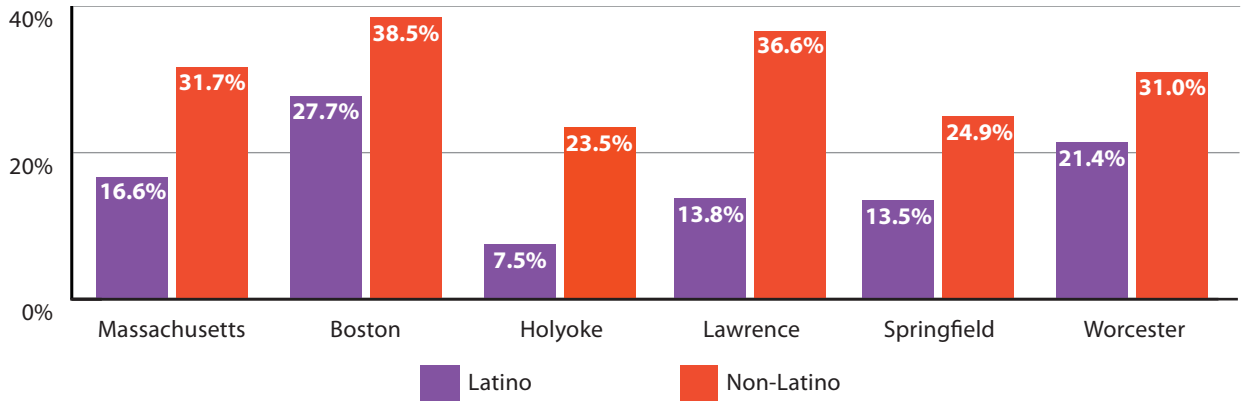
FIGURE 35

### SAT and AP Exam Taking

#### TOOK SAT



#### TOOK AN AP EXAM



Source: MA DESE SIMS and MCAS data, male students in the 2012–13 school year.



FIGURE 36

## High School Graduation Rate

	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE		5-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	
	Latino	Non-Latino	Latino	Non-Latino
Massachusetts	69%	88%	74%	90%
Boston	60%	66%	65%	71%
Holyoke	54%	75%	61%	77%
Lawrence	57%	65%	63%	72%
Springfield	58%	68%	61%	72%
Worcester	73%	82%	78%	86%

Source: MA DESE SIMS data, male students enrolled in 9th grade in a Mass. public school in the 2006–07 through 2009–10 school years. Graduation rate calculated by taking the total number of students from the 9th grade cohort who graduate from a Mass. public school within four or five years of entering 9th grade and dividing it by the total number of students in that 9th grade cohort. Estimates do not adjust for students who transfer out or into Mass. public schools after 9th grade.

clear roadmap for their futures while in school. That is, they had no idea *why* it was important for them to do what they were doing in school.

This lack of future planning in school arose in discussions about their middle school years where many young men said they had no real sense of what they were working toward, what their futures might be, whether college was on their horizon, or attainable, and why was it important that they go. In high school a lot of the same confusion continued, though the young men often found the stakes were higher as they came closer to adulthood. A Boston young man named Carlos, for example, told researchers that in his sophomore and junior year he did not know what he wanted for a career. He had dreamed of playing in the NBA, but discovered he needed a backup plan. Carlos claimed that he learned a little bit about college from school, from watching television, and from his parents—though they had no real sense of how to get there. But it was not until the end of his sophomore year that he realized he needed to bring up his grades since, up to that point, his grades had been low in high school. He claimed that he “just wasn’t as prepared as some others and [his] head wasn’t in the right place.”

The sort of direction they talked about comes from many sources including teachers, administrators, and especially guidance counselors. As above, some students reported having had positive relationships with teachers and administrators who helped guide them. But we have also seen how many young men can fall through the cracks. Guidance offices are natural places for this sort of direction, and some of the young men reported that they learned about college through their counselors. Some reported that guidance counselors tried to reach them, but they did not listen or follow through. A young man named Richard who went to a public high school in Boston reported that his guidance counselor encouraged him to apply to college and take the SAT, but after he slept in on the morning of the test, he gave up and disregarded his counselor’s advice.

More commonly, young men reported they rarely or never saw their counselors and thus saw their avenue to higher education blocked. Brian from Holyoke claimed he rarely saw his guidance counselor and when he did,

*He was only there for schedule and that was it. The only conversation [about the future] was: Graduate.*

FIGURE 37

### Student to Staff Ratios

	AVERAGE STUDENT-TO-TEACHER RATIO		AVERAGE RATIO OF COUNSELORS-TO-STUDENTS	
	Latino	Non-Latino	Latino	Non-Latino
Massachusetts	13	12.07	257	293
Boston	10.7	10.8	490	450
Holyoke	12.67	11.12	227	196
Lawrence	10.73	10.73	219	219
Springfield	11.44	11.03	237	229
Worcester	13.53	13.87	615	687

Source: MA DESE SIMS data, high school males, 2012–13 school year and MA EPIMS teacher data. These are the average ratios faced by students in each category. Ratios are calculated dividing the total number of full-time equivalent teacher or guidance counselor hours. Therefore, two half-time guidance counselors would count as one guidance counselor. Numbers in red denote that the mean of non-Latino males is not statistically significantly different from the mean for Latino males for that urban area. Schools serving only grades 9–12 with at least 100 students are included in the sample. Alternative, collaborative, and special education schools are excluded.

Miguel from Lawrence said the same thing,

*My counselor wasn't really a good counselor... He didn't really counsel me ... he was only there for scheduling [classes] and that was it.*

And in Springfield, Francisco, who attended a charter school, wanted to go to college but did not know what to study and found the whole process for applying for financial aid confusing. He pointed to his guidance counselor as the problem due to the fact that there was only one guidance counselor for 60 students. Quantitative data, in fact, bears this out and shows how guidance offices and counselors are, like teachers, under-resourced. **Figure 37** shows low counselor-to-student ratios in each of the urban areas. The average Latino high school male has a guidance counselor that is also responsible for hundreds of other students. There are simply not enough in many schools to fill the need, and this left students feeling, as Brian from Holyoke noted, “Yeah, like I did it [graduate], now like what’s next?”

Another young man named Christian who attended Worcester Technical High School was determined to go to college but felt his teachers

and guidance counselors did not push him in this direction as much as he would have liked. He explained,

*My high school, I felt like they didn't really push as much as I wanted them to. I would have to go after school to my guidance counselor's office and I would say, "I wanna apply for scholarships. I wanna apply for colleges. Can you help me out with this?" I would go and meet with her and she'd say, "Okay, yeah." But they would encourage people to do their trades because that's what they are, they're a trade school. And it's a cool backup thing if you wanna pursue that, but I was like, "I wanna go to college. I wanna go to UMass Amherst" ... I just thought what stuck out was how I had to go after school to the guidance counselor's office and sit there and say, "I want to go to college, can you help me?" That stood out a lot.*

Christian did apply to college and was admitted, and recalled how a teacher at the school posted students' college acceptance letters in her window, which made him proud once his letter was posted. But his narrative reminds us that it was not easy to get the help he wanted to get to college.

In fact, the lack of what might be called college knowledge is a particularly serious issue that raises a number of questions. How do you apply to college? How do you obtain applications and fill them out? How do you know which school and program is right for you? How do you seek and apply for financial aid? What about loans and scholarships? What are they and how do they work? Lack of college knowledge could also refer to a lack of preparedness about what to expect and how to navigate a campus once a student has arrived at the college they were accepted to, and, importantly, where to go to get help.

Most young men in this study claimed that while they were in high school, they neither had access to adequate information about college nor the assistance they needed to get to college. Many said they did not learn from their schools about the college application process or even how and when to fill out the applications; they said the same about college-related financial information. Some mentioned friends and, perhaps, a person in their families (elder sibling, parent, aunt/uncle) who was helpful. More mentioned community-based organizations as the places where they learned about these things. Yet, again, a larger number confessed they had little to no experience with the process. The young man from Lawrence who had moved back and forth between a private Christian school and public schools was especially critical of his high school when it came to teaching financial literacy: "Nobody talked to me about loans. There's no financial literacy piece in high school, in our curriculum, for our kids to realize that when they go to school, they take out loans. Can you really afford it?" Another young man from Lawrence claimed:

*I did everything on my own. Had to do the FAFSA on my own. I had friends help me, you know? I didn't have like a counselor, like one of them to help me. It was really independent. . . . They expect so much out of you that they didn't realize that they didn't show you anything. . . . It really is garbage.*

Remembering his time in high school, a Springfield student named Ivan said he had "so many ambitions, so many dreams," which included wanting to be a paleontologist or a marine biologist, "something to do with science." He said, "My mom wants me to have a Ph.D., but I'm like, 'We can't afford it.' Then the financial aid was complicated." Discussing his school's college application information, he claimed he got "the spiel" that went this way: "Pick your top four, and if you're lucky you'll get one of them. And fill out the financial aid and write for grants." Some students had other plans, such as one young man from Boston, who said he figured he'd join the military because, as he put it, "I know that I could have gotten a free education. . . . They will pay for your college." As it turned out, though, he could not pass the written test and abandoned that plan.

In many of the narratives that detailed successful applications to college, community-based organizations and extra-school programs played pivotal roles. A young man who moved to Boston from the Dominican Republic to live with his mother and begin high school explained that the high school task force in Boston and its mentoring program were tremendously helpful. The people there not only helped him with his transition to attending school in the United States, it also helped him greatly in applying to college. A young man from Worcester's story is in marked contrast to "the spiel" described above. In his junior and senior year he got involved in a Latino youth program: "They helped me apply to college. I got free waivers. I applied to 10 colleges and I got into nine of them." He received financial aid at some, but in the end decided to attend a public four-year university because, as he said, "I am not trying to be in debt for the rest of my life." In each research site there were organizations that were trying to help Latino young men find their path to college, but they are not large enough nor possessed of enough resources to help everyone.

## Income Disparity Between High School Graduates and College Graduates

Concerns about accruing debt while in college and the time that college students must sacrifice to earn a four-year college degree raises doubts for many Latino young men about whether or not pursuing a college degree is worth it. Quantitative evidence, however, shows that college graduates tend to earn more than high school graduates over time. In Massachusetts, the median four-year male college graduate earns 77% more than the median high school graduate (with an annual median income of \$69,810 compared to \$39,429).<sup>94</sup> The gap in average earnings between college and high school graduates starts at \$7,000 at age 22 and then grows from age 22 to 42 before stabilizing.<sup>95</sup> Using the average incomes of college and high school graduates at each age, Christopher Avery and Sarah Turner (2012) estimate that a male college graduate in 2010 could expect to earn \$590,000 more over a lifetime net of tuition than a male high school graduate.<sup>96</sup>

It is important to note that these are not causal estimates. We are not asserting that attending college will necessarily increase earnings to that degree. It is possible that those who choose to go to college could have earned in the top percentiles of high school earners had they not pursued a college degree. Alternatively, there are several arguments for a causal link between college graduation and outcomes. A college degree allows people to pursue a variety of well-compensated career tracks and upper level management positions not available without the credential. Furthermore, college signals ability to employers, strengthens skills, and widens social networks.

To delve further into the wage gap, one can look at the distribution of earnings of college and high school graduates instead of averages and medians. Using two different large U.S. survey datasets, both Avery and Turner, and Brad Hershbein and Melissa Kearney (2014), find that college graduates earn more than high school graduates at each percentile of the earnings distribution. Specifically, the 10th percentile earner for high school graduates earns significantly less than the 10th percentile earner of college graduates. The same holds for each percentile in the distribution.

Hershbein and Kearney go further to show that the distribution of earnings by college major. The lowest earning college major exceeds the earnings of high school graduates at every point in the distribution. There are some exceptions to the profitability of a college degree, for example the top tenth of high school graduates earn more than the bottom tenth of college graduates from each major. In general though, the evidence speaks to college graduates faring far better than high school graduates based on the median earnings and the distribution of earnings.

## A Young Man's Story:

### Unstructured Adolescence and Lack of Academic Counseling – Lucas, Holyoke

*Lucas is 19 years old and was born and raised in Holyoke. He attended the same school from kindergarten through sixth grade. Lucas recalls enjoying elementary school. He was well behaved and turned in his homework on time. Lucas's mother is a bus driver and his father is unemployed. His older brother and sister weren't as well behaved as he was and often picked on him for being the baby of the family. Both of his siblings ended up dropping out of high school. For Lucas, his siblings served as examples of what path not to take.*

*When Lucas was little, he dreamt of becoming an actor one day. He watched lots of TV and wanted to be famous. Once in middle school, Lucas took part in the drama club after school. His parents didn't have specific expectations for him in terms of his future. His mother just always told him to go to school and do well, but that was about it. Lucas describes himself as a "B student." His parents were satisfied with that and so was he. He didn't see any reason to try harder if his parents were fine with Bs. Lucas remembers spending lots of time hanging out with friends in middle school and then doing his homework afterwards.*

*High school was scary at first for Lucas, mostly because it meant being in a new building with more students he didn't know. For the first time, Lucas's grades began to slip in high school. He wasn't focused on school, only friends. He failed at least one class each year and had to take them over during summer school. His mother was disappointed by this, but Lucas said he didn't really care as he didn't mind taking summer school. Lucas didn't work or participate in any extracurricular activities during high school; outside of school, he mostly hung out with friends, listening to music and watching videos.*

*In school, Lucas doesn't remember having any conversations about the future beyond high school with counselors or otherwise. He didn't think about college until his senior year and then it was too late to bring up his grades. Now that he has graduated from high school, he doesn't know what he wants to do with his life. Sometimes he thinks about realizing his dream to become an actor, but because he wasn't involved in theater in high school, he feels a little unprepared for going in that direction. He's not sure about going to college because he doesn't know what he would study and doesn't want to waste the time and money getting general education credits. Lucas knows he wants to make a lot of money but doesn't know how to go about doing that. He regrets not doing better in high school because now he thinks it might be too late to "do something big." He would like to leave Holyoke because he's not stimulated there. He thinks about maybe moving to Florida or New York because he has family there who will support him.*



# Peers

Like families and institutions, peers also exert tremendous influence on the way people perceive the world, weigh information, make decisions, and act on those decisions. The young men in this study described a variety of decisions they made and behaviors they engaged in that ranged from productive and positive for their overall well-being to risky and even detrimental to their overall well-being. The men's stories exemplify how peer groups have the potential to aid as much as derail a person's life, particularly when no other apparent forces are at work to help guide that person in the direction of a productive future. What is clear from the narratives in this study is that many young men fell into different peer groups for different reasons at different points in their lives. Moreover, they were frequently introspective about how, at points throughout their lives, peer groups might have helped or hindered them, particularly on a path that had the potential to lead to higher education. In short, the narratives in this section provide illustrative accounts about the heterogeneity of men's experiences with peers across the five research sites, how some men were able to successfully navigate turbulent waters, and some words of wisdom for those following behind them.

## Peer Influences and Personal Responsibility

In virtually all of the cases, peer groups affected the course of the young men's lives. A young man from Springfield named Javier put it this way: "I believe in, like, you're a product of your environment. So, to me, if you're around negative, it's rare that positive comes from that, you know what I mean?" Providing an example, he continued, "So, I wanted to [get my GED] but my surroundings were tempting me otherwise." Here, "surroundings" refers equally to peers and the general social worlds in which men like this one found himself.

Another young man named Mario described his surroundings in this way,

*I think that the poor community definitely gets the short end of the stick because, you know, around middle school and elementary school, we're like sponges. Whatever intrigues us and whatever gets us to the next level, we wanna do it. We're outside [and] in the community. And our community—guess who's in the community?—the poor people that don't do anything. So, that's our surroundings. . . . To the minors, that's your role model and that throws them off, you know?*

Many of the young men who described their experiences in communities where they were surrounded by influences that could potentially divert them from their paths also mentioned taking responsibility for their own actions and the decisions they made in these situations, i.e., they did not see themselves as passive players, lacking knowledge or individual agency. One young man from Worcester named Félix, for example, saw that,

*From 16 to 18, I was just doing bad. Then at 18 . . . I still had dreams of doing good in life, but it's like there was just something there blocking me from doing it. I felt it was my friends.*

In time, he distanced himself from them and put himself on a different path, which he claimed was, "doing something better for me." Put differently, while each participant's specific set of circumstances clearly informed his available (and limited) opportunities, the decisions made, given the opportunities available, were frequently acknowledged as personal choices.

Taken together, the dozens of narratives provided by participants in the study paint pictures of how and why their peer groups evolved over time, and how their own interactions with them similarly changed.

## The Changing Nature of Peer Groups

In their elementary school years, young men told of how they spent much of their time with peers in and outside of school, “hanging out,” or involved in various play activities. At this age, “hanging out” or “just chillin’” were periods of mainly unstructured interaction among participants and their peer groups in which youth might play video games, watch television or movies, or simply lounge around talking with friends. Playing sports, which might be structured or unstructured, was among the most frequent of the young men’s responses for how they occupied their time with peers during this time. For the young men, sports was part of the bonding and socialization process with peers, a means for young people with similar interests to pursue those interests together and sometimes help move through difficult situations. A young man from Worcester named Arturo noted,

*My mom passed away when I was six, so I started boxing when I was six. I boxed for a couple of years, then, at eight, I started playing basketball, football, and stuff. . . I was just playing sports.*

Though not restricted to the domain of peers, time spent with friends was also a way for these men to imagine their futures in the grandiose ways one might expect from young children. A Boston young man named Ramon recalled,

*When I was seven or nine, I remember I used to say, like, “Well, I want to be a baseball player.” I used to be on the team. So, that was my dream.*

Others talked about wanting to be professional basketball and football players; some wanted to be entertainers, specifically as musicians or actors; others talked about becoming police officers, fire fighters, doctors, inventors, scientists, artists, and video game designers. Less frequently their future dreams involved military service, and when it did, participants were often able to trace a direct connection to a male role model in their family (father, brother, or uncle) who had served in the armed forces. One Springfield student named Jason, for example, claimed to want to be in the

military when he was very young because he “love[d] the Army.” But he also spoke about a personal connection to the military that likely influenced that path,

*My father was in the army . . . and he went to Puerto Rico. That’s where he met my mom and whatever and when they had me.*

## Too Cool for School: From Middle School to High School

A particularly large number of young men interviewed for the project said their peer group composition and purpose changed markedly in the middle school years. A number of developments seemed to coalesce at this period. The young men often left their elementary schools for larger middle schools in which there were more people they did not know; middle school-style instruction differed markedly from that of elementary school; puberty complicated matters; and the importance of “being cool” took on much greater significance in their lives. In turn, their new surroundings afforded them a number of different interrelated avenues for being perceived as cool around their peers, and it was peer pressure, many respondents confessed, that prompted much of the decision making at this stage in their lives. As Fernando, a young man from a Springfield focus group, saw it:

*When you’re young, you’ve got the people that you don’t know are bad influences and you don’t know who’s who. There’s a lot of people who will tell you something you don’t know, so now you’re under the impression, under this, “This will get me there? Okay, cool.”*

Explaining how influential peer pressure can become, another man named Oscar added that the desire to be cool affected:

*The music you’d listen to, the people you’d wanna hang out with and chill. Because it’s just about, like, pussy and bitches and stuff, and that’s what everybody’s listening to and that’s what’s gonna be cool. That’s what’s gonna show and what group you gonna try and eventually be in and stuff like that.*



A young man from Boston named Manuel told of the peer pressure associated with buying the right clothes, especially sneakers:

*If you don't have Jordan's, you weren't nothing. That's what it was for me in middle school. If you ain't havin' the Nikes on it doesn't matter what else you got on.*

But peer pressure extended to much more than purchasing the right footwear—it also affected how they acted. Another Springfield student named Carlos put it succinctly:

*For boys it, it's also your peers. They pressure you, they start looking at you differently. Like, "Oh, you think you're better than us 'cause you don't want to have fun."*

In other words, the actions, sense of style, and outward identity of a person determined where and by whom he would be accepted, and his failure to play this game resulted in ridicule at best.

### **The Slippery Slope from Cool to Bad**

In such a milieu, there were many ways to build a “cool” identity and acquire social capital, a process that began in middle school and followed men into high school. For example, as one interviewee named Dante noted, it was important to “listen to mainstream music, you know, being on top of everything.” In focus groups and interviews, participants noted there were many other ways to publicly prove one’s “coolness” as well: getting involved with gangs, smoking “weed,” being involved in what a few young men called “corruption,” going to parties, buying the right accessories (including but not limited to clothing), owning the right games and technology, drinking alcohol, getting into fights, being intimate with girls, and skipping school were among the most frequently noted. A Springfield young man named Eric noted that it was during the middle school years when “you’re looking at stuff, you’re looking up to things . . . that’s the exploring, that’s the experimental stage.” Agreeing with this description of the routine, another young man added, “Everybody wants to be drunk and party . . . so, you wanted to grow up. You wanted to be the cool kid.”

Like youth of many ethnicities and generations, the men told stories about how easy and natural it was to fall into this game, and in the process, fall in with a crowd that they regularly called “the bad kids.” As one young man from Boston named Edwin recalled, around the eighth grade “I started to change. Hanging out with them [the bad kids], and everything changed.” Referring to the middle school years but continuing on into high school, many said things such as, “You wanted to act so adult at that age” and, “You wanted to be older than you are.” Another participant, Marco from Springfield, connected it directly to machismo, even at this young age,

*Guys have to be machismo. Oh, I'm too cool for school, I don't want to be here [school], we have to skip.*

But in the race to be cool, there were often consequences that were unseen and would present problems down the road.

As explored more in the previous section on institutions, some of the stories related by the young men spoke of the different ways they tried to be “too cool for school,” while actually remaining at school. There was a real irony here: Participants had to be in school to score points with peers and those points were made by showing how much one did not care about school or its rules. Getting into fights, disrespecting authority, bullying, and skipping class or school were ways to build reputation among peers, but the schools were necessary (even ideal) venues in which this reputation-building could occur. Luiz, a young man from Lawrence who recalled himself as a joker in middle and high school, for example, confessed, “I was a mean joker.” But he also acknowledged, “The friends I had probably influenced [me] for mean jokes.” His jokes were aimed at easy targets in school, creating a difficult environment for those on the receiving end, but they also ran the risk of getting him into trouble for being mean-spirited, all of which was part of establishing himself within the hierarchy of his peer group. In short, he took advantage of the opportunity school afforded (bringing a diversity of youth together) to establish his own credibility.

Interestingly, Luiz described himself as overweight and said he was picked on himself. But scoring points at the expense of others made him less of a target, and he knew it.

In this environment, teachers and school personnel might have played a role in keeping the young men from falling in with “bad kids” or in slacking off. This, too, is explored more in the previous section where teachers and administrators serve as positive role models and/or intervene in young men’s lives to help keep them on track. However, there are many settings outside school in which the young men in this study made decisions in and around peer groups that did not involve teachers. These decisions ran the gamut from helpful to destructive when factored into their paths to higher education. Important questions to bring into focus, then, are why and how were they making the decisions they made along this spectrum?

## The Purposes of Peer Groups

As peer groups can inform decision making in positive and negative ways, it is equally important to consider peers’ influences on young men and the decisions they made themselves. On one hand, many of the young men’s narratives about peers evidence positive outcomes. In a number of instances men relied on peers to help them through difficult times. In other stories about peers, men tried to avoid falling in with groups that could ultimately harm their chances to succeed in education and life, and when they fell into such groups, they attempted to distance themselves from these negative influences.

## Peers as Support

When strong and supportive family influences were present in their lives, young men tended to align themselves with peer groups that would be helpful to their success. One young man from Lawrence named Jose believed that the impact of a good peer group could be undermined without solid parental role models:

*I’m going to say this: Birds of a feather flock together. That little saying right there means a lot. If you have a group of friends that, in the end of the day, do the same things, have the same interests, and are very reflective in their home environments, too, [but] if the parents are not involved with the kids’ progress, they don’t know any better or in the end they doubt themselves.*

Other accounts suggested that even in the absence of solid parental role models, the young men who were in college or were college-bound reported that peer groups were important components to their success. A Boston young man named Michael, who was admittedly not good at math, told researchers,

*I had a really good friend, he became a really good friend, I made him a friend, and he was really good at math and he helped me do my work.... You have to find friends just like that.... Once you find the right people it starts to become easy.*

In this context, but also in the more specific context of successfully heading toward college, the “right people” were studious friends and, often, girls. Another young man from Boston named Alfonso said it was his girlfriend who motivated him,

*She said, “You know, [going to college] is a good thing. You’re gonna have a better future and you don’t wanna be, like I said, struggling.”*

Young women provided men with more than scholastic support. Some of the young men interviewed said that in middle school and into high school, girls and girlfriends became a significant part of their lives. Whether it was friendship, flirting, dating, or “going with” them, girls became a way for young men to establish credibility among their peers. Men’s machismo was also known to surface at these moments, particularly in terms of being a “ladies’ man,” such as when the young men saw themselves as “dogs” or used machismo to justify poor treatment of their female peers. But their relationships with young women, despite occasional troubling traits, did not always translate into strictly chauvinistic behavior. One young man from Springfield named Carlo, remembering his

middle school years, also spoke of a healthy peer relationship with a young woman in this way:

*That's when I found out about women; and I was just, how do you say it in English? Mujerero [womanizer]. Aww, man, I loved it. I had perfect grades. One of my friends, I'm still in contact with her; she was the smartest girl I knew. I was always with her, you know? She was my best friend.*

For some of the young men, girls provided something of a respite to the rigors of both machismo and peer pressure. Though not in the most flattering way, Steven, a young man from Holyoke, put it like this,

*I've always been more friendlier with girls because I know what they're about. They like to talk a lot of crap, but I mean, they gossip. They're more mellow. Yeah, they fight over stupid stuff, but they're more mellow. You say the wrong thing to a boy and it's like they want to fight you.*

And there were reports of how relationships with women helped the young men work through particularly difficult times. A Springfield young man named Justin, who had been abandoned by his family and rendered homeless, said at this point in his life he was living with his girlfriend and their baby trying to make ends meet. He was considering earning his HSED and going to college but was concerned about the cost. Similarly, a young man from Lawrence named Ricky told researchers that when his best friend and his family were killed by their stepfather, "I had a girlfriend at the time and she helped me."

The narratives of the young men told of instances where their peer groups specifically helped keep them on a path toward school and college. A young man from Boston named Jon, for example, said his friends had all dropped out and he was on the same path. Bored at school and socially promoted, he claimed,

*I don't want to go to college. I'm already in high school, [and] high school is terrible ... I just want to make some money.*

Though his peers had already dropped out, they told him to,

*Do that high school-college thing because, yeah, you'll get more money that way.*

At the time of his interview, he was considering community college to improve his grades and claiming he wanted to be a teacher. The narrative of another Boston young man named Alex illustrates a connected recurring theme: the fear of the wrong path. Claiming that his freshman and sophomore year grades were poor because his "head wasn't in the right place," he buckled down in his last two years and improved his grades with the help of close friends who stayed out of trouble. But he also said it was instructive to use the path he did *not* choose as a reminder of where he wanted to be,

*I knew that if I started going down that [wrong] path, I've seen some kids go down that path and they keep going, and I didn't wanna end up like that.*

A few of the narratives detail how community organizations were essential in keeping young men from succumbing to the bad influences around them. Churches and religious organizations figured prominently here. As one young man from Springfield named Juan recounted:

*I never did drugs; I never got around to it.... Bad kids were doing it, but I never heard of weed, I never drank, it was never on my mind. I even went to this church for kids that was super cool; it was dope; it was the shit... I think it was just the people I was around. They were positive people.*

This story is particularly compelling because he did not want to spend too much time at his home as it was fraught with drug abuse, violence, and estrangement. Yet, through his peer groups he managed to stay away from all that, though his educational path suffered. Young men from all five urban areas in the study reported how important community-based organizations had been in their lives, particularly in navigating the college and financial aid application processes. Young men

who did not learn much about either in school complained about their lack of preparation in this regard, referring to this lack as one of the “barriers” they faced.

Finally, some of the young men pointed to moments in their own lives that served as empowering wake up calls, and part of the ensuing life reorganization meant changing their peer groups. Among the most powerful influences in this regard was the birth of a child. A young man from Worcester named Pete who began to do poorly in school because his “friends were a bad influence” told researchers he cut most ties with them for the sake of his own son whom he had at age 16: “My son doesn’t need to see me passed away or need to come to see me in the joint or anything like that.” Another Worcester young man named David similarly reported that he changed his life because, “I want to take care of my son; I want him to grow up knowing that I did in my life, that I tried to do good with my life.” Interestingly in light of these narratives, the young men in the study, reflecting on what would have made a difference in their lives and specifically what would have helped them “get on a path that is good for them,” repeatedly cited, “role models,” “mentors,” “father figures,” and “community centers.”

### Effects of High Mobility and Transience on Peer Groups

Many narratives of the young Latino men in this study revealed that geographic, socioeconomic, and familial circumstances led to peer group choices that, in turn, negatively influenced decisions they made on their paths. Mobility and transience, for example, led to many issues, some having to do with peer group formation. Young men from all five research sites reported moving from school to school, state to state, and country to country due to a number of situations. There are a host of educational issues accompanying these situations that have been documented elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> But there are also profound social issues. One young man from Springfield named Ricardo, for

example, reported being in four or five different schools in his elementary years alone. While that is admittedly an extreme case, **Figure 38** shows that the school districts in each of the five research sites experience roughly 2 to 2.5 times the churn rate for Massachusetts public school districts overall. For example, in Holyoke, 23.2% of students enrolled in the district transferred in or out of a public school within the district in a year. Latino students experience a slightly higher churn rate (with the exception of Lawrence where the rate for all students and Latino students is similar). English language learners (ELLs), who have significant overlap with the Latino population, experience a higher churn rate in each area relative to the Latinos.

Some young men who transferred schools reported having trouble putting down roots and making friends as a result of their instability, which compromised their support networks. As Ricardo from Springfield put it, “All it did to me was make me a little more antisocial and stuff ‘cause I would, like, lose friends eventually and stuff like that.” Even if a student does not move, the high churn rates in these urban areas could disrupt students’ social networks and support systems. In contrast, students from smaller schools who spent many grades together reported that it was much closer:

FIGURE 38

### Churn Rate of Students in Academic Year 2013–14 by District

	All Students	Latino	ELL
Massachusetts	8.5	16	21.2
Boston	15.6	15.9	19.7
Lawrence	22.7	22.5	29.8
Holyoke	23.2	24.7	28.7
Springfield	21.6	23	27.2
Worcester	18.3	21.7	23.6

Source: MA DESE School/District Profiles. Churn rate takes the number of students transferring into or out of a public school within the district and divides it by the total number of students enrolled in the district at any point in the year.

“We grew up like a family.” With that came learned knowledge of “good kids” and “bad kids,” and the ability to navigate around them.

Many young men reported being from houses in which the parents, or other guardians, were not frequently present. Reasons for this ran across a wide range from single parenthood—which itself is the result of a variety of causes including divorce, death, immigration, incarceration, and drug abuse—to long working hours and multiple job holding. Sometimes, lack of parent involvement prompted young men to focus on the things they needed most. As a Springfield young man named Eduardo said,

*When I was growing up, I moved a lot. My mom and my stepfather had a drug problem. I was in and out of foster homes, she got us back, lost us again. Then when I was growing up, since she had the drug problem, I had to take the lead role to take care of my brothers and my sisters. So, I had to make the sacrifice, either high school, or home, because my mom was addicted. So, I took care of what I had to take care of. I mean, I eventually, I got my GED [HSED]. I did school, college. But there was some bumps in the road.*

Sometimes, however, lack of parent involvement created opportunities for young men to make bad decisions in empty houses, decisions that had serious educational ramifications. A young man from Springfield named Joel said,

*It was just my mother. My dad was in jail or was on drugs. Either or—he wasn’t there. But my mom was always at work ‘cause it was four of us . . . my brothers weren’t there for me. So, I had nobody to turn to, nobody. So, I’d just pick up bad role models like the drug dealer up the street. I see him with a stack. I see him with his pockets fat, [cash] coming out. “Oh, I like that. I want that.”*

Another Springfield young man named Ruben told of his regular practice of skipping school to “smoke weed.” He did not get caught, or at least not that much, because he would “wait for [his] mom to leave to do work so [he] could go back into the house.” When the school called, as Ruben said, “I’d give them my number so they could call me and I’d give [the phone] to my older brother and he’d act like my father and in exchange I’d give him, like, weed.” In further explaining why he engaged in this behavior, Ruben answered simply, “Peer pressure.”

Of course, among the most important reasons for involvement with peer groups are companionship and purpose. Some of the young men claimed to have chosen their peer groups because they were unable to figure out what they were supposed to do—they were not getting clear directions and explanations elsewhere, either from families or schools. A young man from Lawrence named Oscar said it this way:

*I wouldn’t say I was trying to follow everybody, but I was just, like, trying to figure out what is high school? So, it was like, “Alright, I see everybody smokin’ weed, so I might as well.” . . . That’s when it got more intense . . . that’s when the partying came, and just when everything came. . . . I think I would have been doing something positive and something, you know, I think if I had somebody behind me pushing me and telling me in my ear constantly, “Do, this, do that.” I really never had that . . . so, it was just like, alright, you’re gonna do what you see in your neighborhood or where you’re going.*

Often peers helped young men understand and deal with the traumatic things they had experienced. A young man from Springfield named Ron said, “I’ve seen a lot of things. I’ve heard a lot of things. I’ve seen people die. I mean, you wake up in the morning, you see a parking lot with a memorial that wasn’t there yesterday ‘cause somebody just died.” He turned to friends, in part because he had no other place to go. As he said, “It’s hard to be right at school if you’re not right at home.” But those friends were not positive influences.

Ron made connections to gangs in this context, too. In their narratives, the young men who spoke of them noted that they served as surrogate families. As one Springfield young man named Chris said, “That’s your family away from your family.” Not the stereotypical gangs of television and movies, the gangs the young men described were simply groups of kids from the same area who all looked out for each other. As one young

man named Marcial said, “It was mostly like, some of us wouldn’t eat. So, boom! We would just try to help each other survive.” In this example, if one of them had something to eat, they’d share it. Another young man added, “We all had a love for each other that’s like, you’d die for one of your brothers. That shit’s real. ‘Cause there’s no greater feeling than feeling like you belong somewhere.”

# A Young Man's Story:

## Addressing Socio-Emotional Needs – Sergio, Lawrence

*Sergio was born and raised in Lawrence. During his elementary school years, he remembers being a class clown at school and a difficult child at home; he often teased his brother and had a hard time controlling his temper. His social life at this age consisted of playing with kids who lived in the same building as him. Sergio was always bigger than other kids his age; he thinks this influenced his tendency to hang out with kids older than him.*

*In middle school, Sergio was often picked on for being overweight. This teasing affected him for years, causing him to become very self-conscious about his body, contributing to his low self-esteem. It was around this time that he started hanging out with the “not so good kids” who brought out his negative side. In retrospect, he considers this period of his life the beginning of a downward slope. Despite his mother and one teacher in particular trying to motivate and encourage him to be a better son and student, he didn't listen to them. He also had no vision of the future at this time; he just didn't care.*

*His inability to manage his anger worsened and eventually got so bad that his mother sent him away to live in “residential” (a residential behavioral health center). The transition to living there was difficult at first, but he got used to it, and eventually became the staff's favorite. Though he didn't realize it at the time, the facility and the staff helped him improve his anger management and behavior tremendously. It was by far the strictest school he had ever attended—there was a set routine and residents were supervised even during their free time. Looking back, he thinks that feeling liked by the school staff, and later by his peers as well, made him feel good about himself.*

*Before starting high school, Sergio returned to living with his mother and siblings. He experienced far fewer problems with his family after the residential. He also made friends with more positive people who had a better influence on him. But his vocational high school experience was also challenging. Sergio developed sleep apnea during his sophomore year and began to chronically fall asleep in class. This made him feel dumb when he would fall asleep in front of other students, and few people, including the school staff, believed that he had a medical problem. Most people just thought he was lazy. This, coupled with his sleep apnea made him increasingly impatient with others. One day, when a fellow student disrespected him, he hit him on the head with a bottle; Sergio spent the subsequent seven months in juvenile detention. When he got out, he was given a mentor who helped him immensely; the mentor even helped Sergio get his GED. Sergio eventually became a mentor himself.*

*Today Sergio works as an art instructor at an after school program and really enjoys teaching kids one-on-one. Now, he sees numerous different potential future pathways for himself. He is currently thinking about going to college to study psychology. He has worked with youth with autism and other mental disabilities and enjoys working with them. He sometimes even thinks of becoming a manager at a residential behavioral health center. In thinking about wanting to help youth, Sergio says, “I want to find out a way to let youths know, like, the coolest thing to be is yourself. Like, you know as kids, kids do what kids do, but that's the main point, be yourself. I know it's crazy but I want to implant that into kids. Like I take the bus to work and there's this tag in blue letters—the bus always stops there—it says, ‘Man up, be you.’ And I look at it all the time. I want to take a picture of it. It's just these random words; some guys put it up there and the bus stops right here.”*





# Reflections from Campus

**W**hat about Latino men who have taken some college courses, are currently enrolled in college, or have graduated from college? How do they see their pasts, presents, and futures in terms of their post-secondary educational experiences and careers?

To explore these questions, the study relied on data obtained from surveys that were administered to men in the five cities of focus who, at the very least, have taken some college courses. Respondents were also Latino men over 18 years old who had attended a high school in Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, or Worcester for at least three years between the ages of 14 and 18. They were primarily Puerto Rican (52%) and Dominican (23%) with the remainder split among a variety of Latino ethnicities/nationalities; 95% were U.S. citizens.

It is important to note the colleges that participants attended include technical schools as well as two- and four-year institutions of higher education. It is also worth noting that of those who participated in the survey, only 37% entered college with a major whereas 63% began undeclared.

The survey asked the men to remember back to when they graduated from high school and tell where they saw themselves five years from then. Answers spoke of a variety of educational and career aspirations. Some of their dreams at the time, such as careers in film, Broadway, or professional sports, were especially difficult to attain. But most were more modest.<sup>98</sup> Many answers spoke of an interest in continuing education by earning a bachelor's degree, or going to graduate or medical school. Although some respondents claimed they had not thought much about their futures, others talked about their overarching aspirations for the future: "owning a house and a car," having "a good-paying career," "paying off my loans," "getting married," "traveling," and "be[ing] rich."

In short they ran the gamut from, "Well, with the family I have, I had no choice but to go to college. So, I saw myself getting a bachelor's degree, and going to work full time to buy a house and living happily" to at least one person responding that five years after graduating high school he would be "dead or in jail."

Respondents were asked when they thought about going to college. The responses were telling, as shown in **Figure 39**.

While it was encouraging that 61% of those surveyed, a group that was already in or had completed college, had begun to think about college early, 39% had not given thought to college until late in their educational careers.

When asked what factors were important when choosing to pursue a college education, respondents ranked "to have better job prospects" highest followed by "to fulfill the expectations of my family." The men were given the chance to write in other reasons. While they were not answers from a majority of respondents, they are nevertheless interesting. Some noted it was important "to fulfill my dream" and "to fulfill my expectations," or that

FIGURE 39

## When Did You Think About College?

I pretty much always figured I'd go to college	35%
I started thinking about college when I was in middle school	10%
I started thinking about college during my first year of high school	16%
I started thinking about college during my last years of high school	20%
I started thinking about college after completing high school	19%

Source: Survey conducted by authors.

it is “the only real option in living a comfortable life.” Others said it was “to break the cycle of no one in my family going to college” and “to be the first in my family to attend college.” One noted, “I wanted to prove to society I could do it.”

The men reported that the most important influences in making plans for their futures were, in descending order: family members, high school teachers, friends, and youth groups/organizations. They were also afforded the opportunity to rank the people and groups who helped support them in applying to college. High school guidance counselors and teachers ranked highest, followed by family members, friends, and youth groups/organizations.

The survey asked about their feelings of preparedness to embark on a college education. More than half said they felt not at all prepared (27%) or somewhat prepared (30%). A third of respondents (33%) claimed they felt fairly well prepared. But 8% said they were very well prepared and only 2% said they believed they were extremely well prepared.

The most influential factor in selecting a college, the men reported, was the course of study offered at their chosen schools. However, close to that response—and the highest ranked response in the “very influential” category—was cost. Other particularly influential factors, again in descending order, were flexible course schedule, location of school, and proximity to home.

Respondents were asked what difficulties they encountered while applying to college. The most difficult area they noted was dealing with financial aid, followed by filling out admission forms, and test taking. Getting information about college, as it turned out, was the easiest activity.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents worked while attending school. At the time they took the survey, 54% of the respondents indicated they had a job; 27% had two jobs; and only 16% did not have a job. In terms of time spent at work in addition to school, 32% reported that they work more than 40 hours per week; 32% work 31–40 hours per week;

28% work 16–30 hours per week; and 8% work less than 15 hours per week.

Upon completion of college, 61% of the men surveyed plan to work full time; 18% plan to work in the military; 23% plan to continue their education at a four-year college; 22% are undecided; 26% plan to go to graduate school; and the remaining 3% plan to pursue their career, open their own business, do game design, or work for a family business.

## Open-Ended Questions

A few questions allowed men to write original responses, and in them, participants provided an array of different perspectives—a number of which correspond closely with the data gained from interviews and focus groups. The first of these open-ended questions was: “If you could change one thing about the path you took to college, what would it be?” Researchers found:

- Almost 20% of the responses suggested respondents would not change anything about the path they took to college. Some simply responded, “Nothing,” while others expressed satisfaction or gratitude for the path they chose.
- The most common responses to this question, almost a third of the comments, spoke to men’s wishes that they had been better prepared for college in terms of their own academic performances as well as their knowledge about different schools and opportunities for funding. In terms of academics, several men wished they had worked harder in high school to get better grades and do well on the SATs to have more options for college. Some spoke of systemic issues in high school: “One thing I would like to change would be the communication between my guidance counselor and I, or lack thereof, also the lack of encouragement to pursue a college education by the public school I attended.” But others recognized they did not have a future pathway to college clearly in mind before them. As one respondent wrote, “I wish I would have gone into the process with a

clearer idea of what I wanted to do with regards to major(s) and course of study. I had no real guidance when it came to deciding what field I wanted to pursue.” Interestingly, another 8% of the comments were men expressing a similar dynamic in college in which they were not “taking it [college] seriously at first” but that they also had trouble figuring out how to put efficient schedules together, how to navigate scholarships, etc.

- Some men (5% of responses) wished they had chosen a different school for a variety of reasons, especially location. Some wished they had lived at home to lower bills or had remained nearby to be closer to support networks, but some believed greater distance between home and school would have been better for them. As one man put it, “I wish I would have went to a college that wasn’t near my home. I feel as if I was very unfocused being that I was at home.”
- Finally, 21% of the responses to this question had to do with how the young men wish they had navigated their college choices more efficiently. Most (15%) regretted not going to college sooner because they had taken time off between high school and college (though 2% wish they *had* taken time off). Four other respondents said they left college and wished they had gotten back to it sooner.

A second open response question asked was: “In what ways is college NOT what you expected?”

Responses on this varied as well:

- Just over a half of the comments (53%) spoke about academic issues including curriculum, time management, course length, and scheduling. Most noted that the workload and level of difficulty of the classes was beyond what respondents had expected. They talked a lot about the flexibility of college schedules and the free time for independent work and “self-teaching” that accompanies college-level work. They were surprised and somewhat ill-equipped to manage this new lifestyle at first. A few also noted that, as one person put it, “I did

not expect it to be so difficult to work and go to school.”

- Many respondents (about 9%) were especially concerned about college costs. It is worth noting that these were also among the most lengthy and pointed comments in the survey. One respondent claimed, “I did not expect so much financial stress;” another said, “Paying for it is a lot harder than expected.” Reflecting on the longer term impact of college cost in his life after graduation, one student wrote, “Financially [college] made it extremely difficult to establish yourself as an adult and get your life together when every dime earned is pretty much going towards student loans.”
- A third major area in which expectations did not match up to reality was in terms of campus social life. Some men mentioned not feeling a sense of belonging on campus. For example, one respondent claimed he was racially profiled by campus police forces. But there were also some high points, as when one student claimed, “I never imagined that I would be so involved on campus. I work on campus. I am involved in a few clubs. I am the president of Student Senate and will be giving the speech at my graduation this May.” And race did not always emerge in a negative way: “I didn’t originally consider the culture shock of going to a predominantly white school. I learned a lot about people outside my natural community.”
- One response to this question was especially interesting as it spoke to a range of issues throughout the respondent’s college career: “Each year had a series of challenges that I wasn’t expecting, despite having heard advice and stories from other classmates. Freshman year was hard because of the transition to college-level work and study habits. Sophomore year was hard because people around me were experiencing the sophomore slump. Junior year was hard because, as in high school, it brought with it a greater amount of pressure. Junior year was when most of the core courses for my major were completed and when I had to

start looking and preparing for application to graduate and medical school programs. Senior year is hard because all of my outstanding requirements have hard deadlines in order for me to graduate.”

One of the final open-response questions in the survey asked if respondents felt that they “fit in” in their respective college environments. The good news is that the majority of respondents (66%) said they fit in. However, 18% said they did not and 13% answered somewhere in between, e.g., “sort of,” “sometimes,” “somewhat,” “in certain ways,” “a little bit.”

The most common reason noted for not fitting in—even among the “sometimes” answers—had to do with cultural differences. One of the “no” respondents did not mince words in his comments: “It was hard being a Hispanic in a homogenous student body.” A couple of the “sometimes” answers were more comprehensive in their assessment of their college experiences. As one respondent said, “Somewhat. Due to the high population of Caucasian students I wasn’t really accustomed to the environment, and to me, I feel it was more challenging to fit in, being a Latino, as opposed to Caucasian students.” Another man said, “Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, no. I say yes because I’m dedicated to my studies and passionate about learning, just like many of the students here. However, it’s hard to say that I fit in 100% when I am one of maybe two Latino students in my advanced science classes.”

Beyond cultural issues, respondents identified a few additional areas in which they had trouble fitting into their college communities. These were not new themes: financial concerns, the distractions that come with being close to home, and general senses of being lost, e.g., “I feel if I had someone I could confide in and to guide me I would have. But no, I didn’t.”

The final question on the survey asked respondents how they saw a college education helping them in the future. A particularly high number of men (85%) said they believed college was an important stepping stone toward a better life and future, whether that be a better job, higher salary, greater skills, or new opportunities. As one man wrote, “I see my college education as a door-opener. It will help me be a competitive applicant for jobs, graduate programs, medical schools, and whatever else I seek out, not just because of the name or the degree, but because of the knowledge I’ve been able to acquire over the last four years.” At least one man hoped his positive experience in college provided inspiration to others: “Being able to show youth like me that you can do it.”

However, 10% said they did not think a college education would help them in the future and 4% were either unsure that it would or thought it would only help a little. A few responses were connected to financial issues. One man said, “I don’t believe it will. Bills may pile towards a career I can’t find work in.” Another claimed college would get him “a better paying job with more debt.” The remainder of these comments simply noted the respondent did not see college as helping him, sometimes because they had not finished.

That said, the most lengthy responses were of the first variety, detailing the importance of a college education in the men’s lives. One man noted, “This education will open many doors to me and help so much with my future. Even if a job is not attained, I will still have a degree in engineering which will go a long way compared to just a high school diploma.” Another said, “College has provided me with opportunities that I can’t imagine I would have received if it wasn’t for my degrees. It also allows me to provide my son with the best opportunities for success.”

# Recommendations

## Recommendations for Increasing Opportunity for Young Males

The narratives and statistics in the study underscore how opportunities for Latinos are *limited* by regional economic conditions and lack of educational opportunity and *expanded* through strong parental engagement and programming offered by CBOs; accordingly, the state, foundations, and the private sector should consider initiatives that:

1. Expand the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities Strategy to include paid internships and mentorship opportunities that allow youth to explore the world of work while earning a living wage.
2. Increase opportunities for free and effective ESL programs for out-of-school youth and their families, preferably connected to adult basic education programs.
3. Develop family-centered programs operated through partnerships, including K–12 schools, higher education institutions, and CBOs that encourage youth and families to gain knowledge and power about:
  - a. Navigating the K–12 education system
  - b. Financial literacy and budgeting for education
  - c. The process of selecting colleges and applying to college
  - d. The process of applying for financial aid and scholarships
  - e. The college experience
  - f. Career opportunities and the job market
4. Build capacity in community-based organizations—identified by youth as an important resource—to augment college access programs—beginning in middle school and

lasting through high school—to include the development of formal relationships with higher education institutions.

## Public Policy Recommendations

The young men in the study point to three considerable barriers to pursuing post-secondary education that can be addressed in part through policy changes: cost, a high school experience that seemed untethered to preparing for college and career, and a lack of pathways for out-of-school youth to re-engage in the process.

1. Implement bold steps to make college more affordable and simplify the cost structure for families. For example, policy makers should support efforts at the national level to offer free community college education coupled with student support services to promote completion and the transition to four-year bachelor's programs. More locally, policy makers should promote and publicize new agreements between community colleges and state universities in Massachusetts that provide a pathway for students who complete their associate's degree and transfer directly to state universities to complete their bachelor's degree for a total not to exceed \$30,000 in four years.
2. Reconceptualize the middle school experience to include opportunities for future planning, and the high school experience to include vocational, early college, and coop opportunities and ensure that online educational opportunities are explored.
3. Identify and implement initiatives that directly deal with out-of-school youth. Latino young men often fall into this category of youth, a subset of the population outside the domain of the K–12 or the higher education system. Efforts

should build on the Gateway Schools model that allows out-of-school youth to enter into community colleges and earn high school and college credits.

## Higher Education Recommendations

The majority of youth and families viewed colleges and universities as entities beyond their daily reality. This lack of intersection in the lives of Latino students fosters a sense of otherness. Accordingly, higher education institutions should:

1. Improve and deepen relationships between colleges and the Latino community through partnerships with cultural institutions, community-based organizations, and K–12 schools to develop Latino cultural awareness programs on college campuses, in K–12 schools, and in communities. Examples might include exhibits that highlight the history and biographies of Latinos, oral history projects involving elder community members, etc.
2. Become a part of the lives of potential college students by developing highly structured, year-long programs for those who were unable to gain admission so they gain a stronger foundation and develop socialization skills.
3. Develop schedules and conditions that recognize the need to earn an income while enrolled in college as an important factor, and increase career services to improve the quality of work opportunities including closer ties with regional employers and industry.

## Recommendations for Schools

Latino students are overrepresented in poor performing schools and districts. After decades of education reform in Massachusetts, it is simply unacceptable that only 6% of Latino male high school students will earn a four-year college degree. Communities must hold schools accountable and provide the resources and leadership to improve outcomes. The voices of youth in this study compel us to:

1. Ensure adequate administrative support of K–12 teachers to ensure positive classroom environments and implement school-wide staff training programs about the negative effects of labeling (e.g., “troublemaker,” “underachiever,” etc.) and the necessity of extending second (and third) chances to students in the hopes of getting them back on track.
2. Recruit more ethnically representative K–12 faculty and administrative staff by developing high school/college programs for aspiring Latino educators (e.g., a Future Latino Teachers Program) and building a greater sense of belonging for Latinos in all schools, K–16.
3. Explore curricular and extracurricular opportunities beyond Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) prep that develop student creativity, intellectual curiosity, and the ability see the world in interdisciplinary ways. Initiatives should begin early—particularly in middle school—and should be tied to college expectations and 21st century job market skills, and should also augment schools’ relationships with CBOs to help create positive environments for after-school hours.
4. Create Latino mentor programs and opportunities in and through schools (K–12 with an emphasis on middle school, and colleges) and community organizations.

## Recommendations for Further Research

This study is a multi-sited approach that consciously looked to identify issues affecting the educational pathways of Latino young men across five Massachusetts cities (Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester) using a fusion of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Throughout the course of the research, it became apparent that studies focusing on specific issues in specific cities would uncover more specialized data to help address each locale in its own right. Below are suggestions for studies that build on this study's findings and methodology.

1. Studies that focus on how public health issues (e.g., substance abuse and mental health) and social service issues (e.g., family instability, foster care, physical abuse) impact educational pathways
2. Studies that follow a cohort of Latino male college students from admission to college to graduation to explore the college socialization process, academic readiness and performance, and other factors affecting completion
3. Studies that explore the effects that specific educational policy environments and problems have on educational pathways in each of these cities
4. Studies that examine how sociocultural dynamics within and among different groups (e.g., ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, geographic) in each city affect educational pathways
5. Studies that focus on these cities independent of each other to allow for in-depth research to help effectively implement statewide policy recommendations at the local level





# Appendix: Methodology

## Overview

Researchers on the project proceeded on a number of different methodological fronts. The quantitative researcher provided detailed descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The qualitative researchers administered semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys to Latino young men in all five research sites. Another cohort of participants in Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester were asked to narrate their lives and futures regarding education on film. Community-based filmmakers assisted the young men in documenting their narratives in the absence of the project's researchers. Additionally, Latino families in the cities of Worcester and Holyoke were recruited to take part in focus groups and interviews in order to learn more about their perspectives on the experiences of Latino young men.

## Research Team

The research team was composed of qualitative researchers Dr. Timothy Murphy and Dr. Francisco Vivoni (Worcester State University (WSU)); quantitative researcher and doctoral student Elizabeth Setren (MIT); undergraduate student researchers (from WSU, Clark University, Framingham State University, and Springfield Technical Community College (STCC)); an undergraduate student research training task force (WSU faculty); undergraduate transcribers (WSU and STCC); and the principal investigators of the project overseeing the research, Dr. Thomas Conroy (WSU faculty) and Mary Jo Marion (WSU staff).

## Qualitative Data

The Latino Education Institute reached out to community partners in the five research sites to obtain participants for this study.<sup>99</sup> Community partners recruited participants and secured locations to administer focus groups, interviews, surveys, and videos. Recruitment methods included distributing flyers, using existing relationships within the CBOs, and personally asking Latino young men and their peers to participate. Those recruited were asked to complete anonymous demographic intake forms before taking part in focus groups and interviews.<sup>100</sup> Demographic intake forms asked potential participants about their age, gender, high school graduation status, involvement/progress in college, ethnic/national background, employment, citizenship status, birthplace, and, if applicable, their age when they came to the United States. Once participants were found to meet the criteria for participation in the project (18 years or older, having spent at least three years in any of the five research sites between the ages of 14 and 18, and self-identifying as *Latino*), they were asked to sign consent forms, giving their permission to be recorded. Participants in the family focus groups and interviews were screened by the community-based organizations and the research team to ensure they met the necessary criteria for participation. The young men who took part in the film interviews signed waivers, giving permission to use their images. These participants also stated their names, ages, and places of residence in the videos to confirm that they met the criteria for the project; they were screened by filmmakers to ensure they were Latino. Participants in all parts of the study were compensated in the form of gift cards.<sup>101</sup>

1. **FOCUS GROUPS:** Two focus groups were administered at each of the five research sites. The objective of the focus groups was to engage participants in discussions about their aspirations over the course of their lives as well as their current journeys. Initially, the research team developed a highly structured exercise to help elicit information from the participants. The exercise involved the construction of personal timelines as well as filling out worksheets about the pathways that were open and closed to them at different moments in their lives. Community partners arranged for researchers to conduct focus groups and interviews in different sites in their respective cities. After the second focus group, the team adjusted its method once it became clear that the exercise seemed to be getting in the way of more fluid conversations about the men's lives—e.g., many of the men became overly focused on filling out the paperwork correctly. It also became apparent that this method was perhaps a bit too reminiscent of school and test taking. The team agreed unanimously to run the third focus group in a less structured way, which proved tremendously productive. For all the remaining focus groups, after asking the men to fill out demographic intake forms and consent forms, the researchers guided the men through four different stages of their lives—elementary-school age, middle-school age, high-school age, and the present—beginning each stage with a general discussion of noteworthy events and trends during that time period to help jog the men's memories. Discussions of each stage of their lives elicited information about future aspirations for schooling and/or employment, home life, neighborhood life, social life, school environment, academic performance, and their changing views of themselves and their surroundings.
2. **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:** Eight to 10 men in each research site were recruited to take part in semi-structured interviews. Men participating in the study who were willing to speak in depth about their future aspirations and current journeys were invited to partake in one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting 30–60 minutes with members of the research team. The format of the interviews was loosely structured around that of the focus groups but often yielded more personal stories compared with those that emerged in the focus groups.
3. **FAMILY FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS:** The research team engaged families of Latino young men in focus groups and interviews in the cities of Holyoke and Worcester. Families were asked about their aspirations for their children, how they viewed the role of parenting in terms of children's education, the recurring themes they witnessed in the educational life of their children, and their perspectives about higher education.
4. **SURVEYS:** The online survey was administered at higher education institutions and in community settings in all five of the research sites. The survey comprised open-ended and multiple-choice questions to query whether the college experience met the expectations of students and asked students to rank elements of the college admission process by degree of difficulty. In addition, participants were asked about the extent they felt they fit in on campus, the number of hours they spend working a job while studying, and to name people most influential in making the decision to go to college and those offering the most assistance during the application process. Surveys were administered at higher education institutions and in community settings. The target audience was Latino males between the ages of 18 to 24 who

were either active college students or college graduates, or had completed some college. The demographic intake forms were incorporated into the survey instrument; hence, when the demographic data of participants did not match the criteria for the project, the survey registered this information and stopped them from moving forward with the survey.

5. **FILM INTERVIEWS:** The project contracted community-based filmmakers in Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester to work with young men and record live expressions about their educational journeys. The men discussed important people, critical junctures, points of pride, and what they would change about their trajectories if given the opportunity. The filmmakers started by asking the men to remember their early years in school, specifically in terms of their families' involvement, the role other institutions/factors played, points of pride/regret, and how being *Latino* affected their journey. Participants interpreted the prompts broadly and gave chronological accounts, including vivid details about what helped and hindered their progress.

## Quantitative Data

The analysis includes data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE). These data include the Student Information Management System (SIMS), which includes demographic, suspension, completion, graduation plans, and enrollment data; the MCAS database, which provides student MCAS standardized test scores; SAT and AP databases; and the Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS), which enables estimation of guidance counselor and teacher-to-student ratios. We also utilize the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data for college enrollment, persistence, and graduation outcomes. The NSC database captures enrollment for 94% of undergraduates in Massachusetts.

Statistics for the five urban areas using the MA DESE SIMS data include students who attend public school within that district (including the traditional public school district, charter schools, and alternative schools).

We use micro-level 1% sample of the American Community Survey for 2006–2011 from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series from the University of Minnesota. The paper also references statistics from the 2010 decennial Census Summary File 1 and the 2013 five-year American Community Survey.

## Demography of Qualitative Research Samples

### 1. FOCUS GROUPS AND SEMI-STRUCTURED

**INTERVIEWS:** The total number of demographic intake forms we collected for interviews and focus groups across all five cities was 104. The mean age of our sample is 23 years old. Of the sample, 74.5% graduated from high school or earned an HSED; 54% have enrolled in a college course, but only 30% are currently enrolled in college. Only 7% of our sample graduated from either a two- or four-year college. Fifty-two percent of the sample was employed, working an average of 36 hours per week. U.S. citizens make up 87% of our sample, and of those not born here the average age of arrival in the United States was 13 years old. The cultural breakdown of the sample was 55% Puerto Rican, 24% Dominican, 5% Guatemalan, 3% Salvadoran, 1% Panamanian, 1% Colombian, and 10% other.<sup>102</sup>

### 2. FAMILY FOCUS GROUPS AND

**INTERVIEWS:** The total number of parents participating in the focus groups was 22. All parents had children in the Holyoke or Worcester public school systems. Three fathers and 19 mothers participated in the focus groups. The majority of parents were Puerto Rican. Four additional individuals were interviewed in Worcester: a mother of a Latino male high school student, a father of a Latino middle school boy, a legal guardian and aunt of a male Latino high school student, and a young Latina mother with toddlers. Three of the people interviewed are Puerto Rican and one is Dominican.

3. **SURVEY:** The total number of respondents to the online survey from across all five cities is 135. Respondents are Latino males at least 18 years old who attended high school in any of the five study areas and who had taken college classes or graduated from college. (We did not ask participants to specify two- or four-year higher education institutions.) Forty-two percent are currently enrolled in a college course, 41% had taken college courses but were not currently enrolled, and 17% had graduated from college. Sixty-three percent entered college without a major (undeclared). Of the sample 54% have a job; 27% had two jobs; and 2% had three or more jobs; 64% of respondents work 31 or more hours per week and 38% are the only wage-earner in their households while another 52% said they are one of two wage-earners in their households. U.S. citizens make up 95% of our sample. In terms of background, 52% of the sample was Puerto Rican, 23% Dominican, 8% Colombian, 8% Salvadoran, 8% Brazilian, 6% Mexican, 5% Cuban, 4% Ecuadorian, 2% Peruvian, 2% Guatemalan, 1% Panamanian, and 9% other.<sup>103</sup>

4. **FILM INTERVIEWS:** A total of 16 young Latino men were interviewed for the study. Half of the interviews took place with young men in Lawrence, and four interviews were conducted in Worcester and four in Springfield. The average age of the participants was 22, with the youngest being 17 and the oldest 26. The interview group included college graduates and non-completers as well as high school graduates and non-completers. The youth identified as being Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Salvadoran.

# Appendix: Technical

## Early MCAS Performances' Correlation with Reaching 10th Grade Proficiency

This section will detail the analysis that estimates the correlation of early MCAS outcomes with reaching 10th grade proficiency in math and ELA.

We use male students who were in the third grade in AY 2005–2006 or 2006–2007<sup>104</sup> who took both the ELA and math MCAS exams in grades 3–8 and grade 10. This allows us to use the same set of students in each regression, so the differences between the third and seventh grade estimates are not due to using different groups of students.

The MCAS exams provide a measure of academic performance across the grades. We use scoring Proficient or higher on the ELA and math 10th grade MCAS as the 10th grade outcome of interest. This is a meaningful outcome because it is a requirement for reaching the “competency determination” graduation requirement. If the student does not score Proficient or higher, then they need to fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan to graduate high school.

To determine the relationship between early grade scores and scoring at least Proficient in 10th grade, we use the following regression:

$$\text{Proficiency\_Grade10}_i = \beta_1 \text{Math\_GrX}_i + \beta_2 \text{ELA\_GrX}_i + \text{Characteristics}_i + \text{Year}_i$$

Proficiency status in grade 10 is regressed on math and ELA MCAS outcomes in a prior grade  $X$ . Controls include the school the student attended in third grade along with their third grade characteristics, including race and ethnicity, special education, English language learner, immigrant, and free/reduced lunch status, and the year the student attended third grade. We run this regression separately for each grade 3–8 to look at the relationship between performance in each grade and 10th grade outcomes. In one version of the regressions, the *Math\_GrX* and *ELA\_GrX* variables note whether the student scored Warning, the lowest level, in that subject in grade  $X$ . In another version, those variables note whether the student scored below Proficient (Warning or Needs Improvement).

The top left graph of Figure 32 in the text shows the relationship between scoring Warning on math in an early grade ( $\text{Math\_GrX}$ ) and Proficient in 10th grade with the controls mentioned above. The top right graph shows when the *Math\_GrX* indicator is for scoring Warning or Needs Improvement. Similarly, the bottom panel shows, the relation between scoring Warning on ELA in an early grade and 10th grade proficiency on the left graph and for Warning or Needs Improvement on the right graph.



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- Noguera, Pedro, "Saving Black and Latino Boys: What Schools Can Do to Make a Difference" *Phi Delta Kappan* Vol 93 No 5 (2012): 8–12
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Villavicencio, A., D. Bhattacharya, and B. Guidry, *Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness among Black and Latino Males in New York City* (New York, NY: Research Alliance for New York City Schools, 2013)

Zou, Yali and Enrique T. Trueba, eds., *Ethnography and Schools: Qualitative Approaches to the Study of Education* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002)



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- Hyde Square Task Force, Boston
- Lawrence Community Works, Lawrence
- The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC), Springfield
- The Worcester Youth Center, Worcester

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# Endnotes

1. There has been a good deal of solid and interesting work in this area over the last 15 years, and researchers have taken quantitative approaches from a variety of angles. See, for example, Mary Ellen Good, Sophia Masewicz, and Kinda Vogel, "Latino English Language Learners: Bridging Achievement and Cultural Gaps Between Schools and Families" *Journal of Latinos and Education* Vol 9 No 4, (Oct–Dec 2010), 321–339; Ana León, Elizabeth Villares, Greg Brigman, Linda Webb, and Paul Peluso, "Closing the Achievement Gap of Latina/Latino Students: A School Counseling Response" *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* Vol 2, No 1 (2011): 73–86; the work of Pedro Noguera including A. Wade Boykin and Pedro Noguera, *Creating the Opportunity to Learn: Moving from Research to Practice to Close the Achievement Gap* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), 2011; Ray Kaupp, "Online Penalty: The Impact of Online Instruction on the Latino-White Achievement Gap" *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College* Vol 19, No 2 (Dec 2012), 8–16; and Miranda, Mokhtar, and Tung et al. "Opportunity and Equity: Enrollment and Outcomes of Black and Latino Males in Boston Public Schools," November 2014. While much of this quantitative work is quite good, it only infrequently engages the subjects of their studies on a personal level. There has been a fair amount of scholarship on the idea of an educational pipeline. See, for example, Watson Scott Swail, Alberto F. Cabrera, Caul Lee, and Adriane Williams, *Latino Students & the Educational Pipeline* (Educational Policy Institute, 2005).
2. Population figures are according to the 2010 U.S. Census, American Fact Finder summary sheets.
3. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education SIMS Data.
4. Within five years of their projected four-year high school graduation.
5. Author's estimates using MA DESE SIMS and National Student Clearinghouse data for Latino males enrolled in ninth grade in Massachusetts public schools in the 2003–04 and 2004–05 school years.
6. See DESE data here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/default.html>. In fact, the Lawrence School District was the first district designated as Level 5 in November 2011. In April 2015, Massachusetts was considering putting the Holyoke Public Schools system in receivership.
7. For instance, on average Latino males in Boston attend a school where 58% of their grade reach 10th grade competency compared to 67% for non-Latino males. Likewise, 54% of Latino males' classmates graduate from high school in four years compared to 61% of non-Latino males' classmates.
8. 2010 U.S. Census Summary File 1. See the Community Profiles section for more information.
9. Indeed, this is the first study that fuses extensive qualitative and quantitative approaches while exploring educational opportunities and experiences in these five Massachusetts cities simultaneously. Most studies look at Boston or one community; some look at Boston, Worcester, and Springfield as the state's most populous cities. More common are studies of individual cities. See, for example, the continuing series of Gastón Institute Papers, "Latinos in Massachusetts;" James Jennings and Jorge Santiago, eds., "The Making of Community: Latinos in Lawrence, Massachusetts" (2005); James Jennings, "Social, Demographic, and Economic Profile of Young Black and Latino Males Boston, Massachusetts 2010–2018" (April 2014); Sarah Cohodes, Elizabeth Setren, Christopher Walters, Joshua Angrist, and Parag Pathak, "Understanding Boston. Charter School Demand and Effectiveness: A Boston Update." The Boston Foundation, 2013; Thomas E. Conroy, Madeline Otis Campbell, Dannielle Morrow, and Jennifer Velez, "Suspension in Worcester: A Continuing Conversation" (Worcester, MA: Vincent "Jake" Powers CityLab at Worcester State University, 2014).

10. Laura Rendón, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department, The University of Texas at San Antonio. Quoted from Center for Community College Student Engagement, *Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges* (2014), 4.
11. It is worth noting that the qualitative research team spoke with Latino men and their families and that no interviews or focus groups were conducted with school teachers, principals, or staff. For more on research methods, see the Methodology Appendix at the end of this report. For discussions and examples of ethnography in school and/or youth settings, see, for example, Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Method* (Allyn & Bacon, 1982) currently in its 5th edition; Frederick Erickson, "What Makes School Ethnography 'Ethnographic'?" *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* Vol 15 (1984), 51–66; Yali Zou and Enrique T. Trueba, eds., *Ethnography and Schools: Qualitative Approaches to the Study of Education* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Sunaina Marr Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire after 9/11* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); and Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep, eds., *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, The Global* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). For a classic example of an ethnography about Latino lives, see Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
12. For a good discussion on this phenomenon, see Delores V. Tanno, "Names, Narratives, and the Evolution of Ethnic Identity" in *Our Voices: Essays on Cultures, Ethnicity, and Communication*, edited by Elberto González, Marsha Houston, and Victoria Chen (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1994).
13. Nevertheless, it bears noting that because the demographic intake forms and focus groups were anonymous and because the participants seldom made distinctions between different ethnicities/nationalities during the focus groups, for purposes of analysis, the researchers decided to treat these men's voices as "voices of young Latino men" since the data did not yield more specificity in terms of ethnicity/nationality. The researchers also concluded that, even if they were able to match a specific quote to a participant of a specific ethnic/national origin, because many participants indicated on the intake forms that they were of more than one ethnicity/nationality, it would be difficult to make conclusions about any one ethnicity/nationality under the umbrella term *Latino*, especially given the relatively small number of research participants from each of the five cities. For example, it is not possible to suggest that the opinions and experiences of the only Salvadoran-identified man interviewed in Worcester could stand in for all Salvadorans living in Worcester.
14. "Family Cohesion" is defined as emotional bonding that family members have toward one another. See David H. Olson, Candyce S. Russell, and Douglas H. Sprenkle, "Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems: VI. Theoretical Update" *Family Process*. Vol 22 No 1 (Mar 1983): 69–83.
15. Boston's colonial past, revolutionary history, connection to the Industrial Revolution, role in the Civil War, etc. are all stories represented in school curricula across the country. Conversely, perhaps only Lawrence's 1912 Bread and Roses strike has such national exposure.
16. The communities around Boston had the following number of colleges: Brookline (5), Cambridge (7), Chestnut Hill (1), Medford (1), Milton (3), Needham (1), Newton (4), and Quincy (2).
17. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
18. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
19. For the Census figures, see U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census. Summary File 1, Table PCT 11. Boston city, Massachusetts.
20. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Five-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.



21. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2013 that there were 536,506 Boston residents who were 16 years or older. Of these, 368,856 were in the civilian labor force, 371 were in the Armed Forces, and 167,279 were not in the labor force. U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates. Only 371 (0.1%) were in the Armed Forces.
22. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Five-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates. Median income is adjusted to 2012 dollars.
23. The Census Bureau breaks this down further into two categories: *Educational Services* (43,527 workers) and *Health Care and Social Assistance* (59,668 workers). *Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services* included 51,575 employees (15.6%) and the category is further broken down this way: *Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services* (36,478 workers), *Management of Companies and Enterprises* (230 workers), and *Administrative and Support and Waste Management Services* (14,867 workers). U.S. Census Bureau, Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over, Boston city, Massachusetts, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
24. U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey Estimates.
25. U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey.
26. See the Greater Boston Visitors & Convention Bureau website, Statistics and Reports page at <http://www.bostonusa.com/partner/press/statistics/>.
27. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, “Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston” (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
28. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, “Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston” (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
29. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, “Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston” (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
30. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Five-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates. Median income is adjusted to 2012 dollars.
31. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, “Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston” (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163. The authors explain that Boston “traditionally has lower homeownership rates than the state as a whole.” Nevertheless, this is an important piece of the puzzle providing context for the report that follows as some of the young men interviewed spoke about the impermanence of their lives in terms of relocating and renting.
32. Tenure by Age, 2010 U.S. Census, Summary File 1.
33. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, “Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston” (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 163.
34. U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Status in Past 12 Months by Sex and Age (Hispanic or Latino), 2013 Five-Year American Community Survey.
35. U.S. Census Bureau, Commuting Characteristics by Sex, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
36. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015 enrollment data.
37. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, Summary File 1, Table PCT 11. Holyoke city, Massachusetts.

38. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Holyoke, Chicopee, and Easthampton" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 168. This report grouped Holyoke's population with those of Chicopee (to the southeast) and Easthampton (to the northwest) in all categories except education.
39. U.S. Census Bureau, Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
40. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Holyoke, Chicopee, and Easthampton" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 168.
41. U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Five-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.
42. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Holyoke, Chicopee, and Easthampton" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 168.
43. U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Status in Past 12 Months by Sex and Age (Hispanic or Latino), 2013 American Community Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Five-Year IPUMS American Community Survey Estimates.
44. For a more detailed discussion on Lawrence's Latino population, see Ramón F. Borges-Méndez, "The Latinization of Lawrence: Migration, Settlement, and Incorporation of Latinos in a Small Town of Massachusetts" in Martha Montero-Sieburth and Edwin Meléndez, *Latinos in a Changing Society*. (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007).
45. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015 enrollment data.
46. U.S. Census Bureau, Commuting Characteristics by Sex, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
47. Borges-Méndez, "The Latinization of Lawrence: Migration, Settlement, and Incorporation of Latinos in a Small Town of Massachusetts."
48. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169.
49. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169.
50. U.S. Census Bureau, "Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Lawrence city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
51. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169, p. 7.
52. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169.
53. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169.
54. U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 Five-Year American Community Survey
55. U.S. Census Bureau, Occupation by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Lawrence city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.

56. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Lawrence and Methuen" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 169.
57. See the Springfield city websites at <http://www3.springfield-ma.gov/cos/> (accessed June 2015).
58. See Andrés Torres, ed., *Latinos in New England* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 172–174; and José E. Cruz, "Latino Politics in an At-Large System: Springfield" in Carol Hardy-Fanta and Jeffrey N. Gerson, eds., *Latino Politics in Massachusetts: Struggles, Strategies, and Prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 158–169.
59. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015 enrollment data.
60. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Springfield" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 176. Median ages for other groups are 44 for white and 32 for black.
61. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Springfield" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 176.
62. U.S. Census Bureau, Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Springfield city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
63. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Springfield" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 176.
64. U.S. Census Bureau, Occupation by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Springfield city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
65. See Juan A. Gómez, "An Insider's History of Latino Politics: Worcester" in Carol Hardy-Fanta and Jeffrey N. Gerson, eds., *Latino Politics in Massachusetts: Struggles, Strategies, and Prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 177–190.
66. See Juan A. Gómez, "An Insider's History of Latino Politics: Worcester" in Carol Hardy-Fanta and Jeffrey N. Gerson, eds., *Latino Politics in Massachusetts: Struggles, Strategies, and Prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 177–178.
67. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Worcester" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 177.
68. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015 enrollment data.
69. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Worcester" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 177. and U.S. Census data, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
70. U.S. Census Bureau, Industry by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Worcester city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
71. City of Worcester, Massachusetts *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2014*, 158.
72. U.S. Census Bureau, Occupation by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2013 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over. Worcester city, Massachusetts. 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.

73. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Worcester" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 177. and US. Census data, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
74. Phillip Granberry, Sarah Rustan, and Faye Karp, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Worcester" (2013). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 177. and US. Census data, 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.
75. Family cohesion is defined as emotional bonding that family members have toward one another. See David H. Olson, Candyce S. Russell, and Douglas H. Sprenkle, "Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems: VI. Theoretical Update" *Family Process*. Vol 22 No 1 (Mar 1983): 69–83; and Patricia Gandara and Frances Contreras, *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
76. Robert Balfanz, "Overcoming the Poverty Challenge to Enable College and Career Readiness for All: The Crucial Role of Student Supports," Center for Social Organization of Schools, (The John Hopkins University, 2013). Commissioned by City Year.
77. Jeanett Castellanos and Alberta M. Gloria, "Research Considerations and Theoretical Application for Best Practices in Higher Education: Latina/os Achieving Success" *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* Vol 6 No 4 (October 2007): 378–396.
78. Lorena M. Estrada-Martínez, Mark B. Padilla, Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, and Amy Jo Schulz, "Examining the Influence of Family Environments on Youth Violence: A Comparison of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Non-Latino Black, and Non-Latino White Adolescents" *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* Vol 40 No 8 (August 2011): 1039–51.
79. René Antrop-González, William Vélez, and Tomás Garrett, (2005) "Dónde Están los Estudiantes Puertorriqueños/as Exitosos?: Success Factors of High Achieving Puerto Rican High School Students" *Journal of Latinos and Education* Vol 4 No 2 (2005): 77–94.
80. For other interesting and sometimes qualitative discussions about METCO, see Horace Seldon, "METCO: A Voluntary Desegregation Option" in Murray Friedman, Roger Meltzer, and Charles Miller, *New Perspectives on School Integration* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1979) and, more recently, Susan E. Eaton, *The Other Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). See also Meira Levinson, "The Ethics of Pandering in Boston Public Schools' School Assignment Plan" *Theory and Research in Education* Vol 13 No 1 (2015): 38–55.
81. For more on this, see, for example, A. Lewis, *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Pedro Noguera, A. Hurtado, and E. Fergus, *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).
82. These calculations include those that originally enrolled in two- and four-year colleges, so some of these students could have intended to only get a two-year degree and stay for only two years.
83. A note about faded color in graphs: Faded colors note no statistically significant difference between the Latino and non-Latino estimates. If the color bars remain bold, then there is a statistically significant difference. Statistical significance is influenced by the size of the sample and the dispersion of the data, so it is possible for a small difference to be significant for one urban area, but a relatively larger difference to be insignificant for another urban area.
84. James Jennings, "Social, Demographic, and Economic Profile of Young Black and Latino Males Boston, Massachusetts 2010–2018" (April 2014)

85. Commission for Latino Educational Excellence, "Creating the Will: A Community Roadmap to Achieving Educational Excellence for Latino Students in Worcester," (2011).
86. See, for example, J. Oakes, "Limiting Students' School Success and Life Chances: The Impact of Tracking." In A.C. Ornstein and L.S. Behar-Horenstein, eds., *Contemporary Issues in Curriculum*, 2nd ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999): 224–237; and A. Nora and G. Crisp, "Hispanics and Higher Education: An Overview of Research, Theory, and Practice." In J.C. Smart, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research in Higher Education* (Neu-Isenberg, Germany: Springer Medizin Press, 2009): 317–353.
87. We focus on 10th grade proficiency in math and ELA because it is a requirement for meeting the "competency determination" graduation requirement. If the student does not score Proficient or higher, then they need to fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan to graduate from public high school.
88. These include race, ethnicity, special education status, English language learner status, immigrant, free/reduced lunch status, year, and school attended in third grade.
89. It is important to note that these findings are not causal. Earning a low score on the MCAS is not necessarily predictive of future poor performance; however, controlling for observable characteristics, there is a strong significant relationship. Unobservable traits and experiences likely play a significant role in 10th grade outcomes, but cannot be controlled for in this study. For example, families could respond differently to a below-proficient score on MCAS. Some families could lower their expectations for their child's performance, while others could become more strict about completing homework. These unobserved responses likely contribute to the relationship between third and 10th grade outcomes, but cannot be controlled for here.
90. Thomas E. Conroy and Madeline Otis Campbell, Dannielle Morrow, and Jennifer Velez, "Suspension in Worcester: A Continuing Conversation" (Worcester, MA: Vincent "Jake" Powers CityLab at Worcester State University, 2014). Information for the report and for a previous statistical study by the Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University came from DESE. On the negative impact of suspensions and punitive discipline generally in middle and high school, see also D.J. Losen and T.E. Martinez, *Out of School and Off-Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools* (Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2013); Pedro A. Noguera, "Saving Black and Latino Boys: What Schools Can Do to Make a Difference." *Phi Delta Kappan* Vol 93 No 5 (2012): 8–12; and R. Balfanz, V. Byrnes, and J. Fox, *Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade* (Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2013).
91. See, for example, Edward Gaughan, Jay D. Cerio, and Robert A. Myers. (2001). *Lethal Violence in Schools: A National Study, Final Report*. (New York: Alfred University, 2001); National Center for Education Statistics. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2001* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, 2001); and American Psychological Association, "A Silent National Crisis: Violence Against Teachers" <http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/activities/violence-against.aspx>.
92. Authors' estimates based on MA DESE SIMS data. Calculated for students enrolled in the ninth grade in the five urban areas in the 2006–07 through 2009–10 school years.
93. The survey was administered in Spring 2015. The results on this question, "How prepared do you feel you were to undertake college after graduating from high school?," elicited the following results: not prepared at all (27%), somewhat prepared (29%), fairly well prepared (36%), very well prepared (8%), and extremely well prepared (3%).
94. Data Source: American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, "Median Earnings in the past 12 months (in 2013 inflation-adjusted dollars) by sex by educational attainment for the population 25 years and over."
95. Uses data from 2009 Current Population Survey. See Christopher Avery and Sarah Turner, "Student Loans: Do College Students Borrow Too Much—Or Not Enough?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 26, Number 1, Winter 2012, pp 165–192.

96. This calculation uses public college tuition and assumes a discount rate of 3%. Estimate in 2009 dollars. Expectations are based on the average earnings of male college and high school graduates at each age in 2010. The March Current Population Survey files for full-time, full-year workers using sample weights and assuming 42 years of working were used.
97. See, for example, Lisa Melman Heinlein and Marybeth Shinn, "School Mobility and Student Achievement in an Urban Setting." *Psychology in the Schools* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2000), Vol 37(4), 349–357; Adam Voight, Marybeth Shinn, and Maury Nation, "The Longitudinal Effects of Residential Mobility on the Academic Achievement of Urban Elementary and Middle School Students." *Educational Researcher* (December 2012), Vol 41, 385–392; and Carol S. Parke and Gibbs Y. Kanyongo, *The Journal of Educational Research* (2012), Volume 105, Issue 3.
98. These included jobs in the health field, engineering, personal or family businesses, finance, computers, and the military. Specific occupations mentioned were: guidance counselor, writer/artist, electrician, social worker, mechanic, barber, doctor, teacher, and fireman.
99. Community partners that provided participants for this study are: Job Corps (Worcester/Grafton), Worcester Youth Center, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (Springfield), Enlace de Familias Inc (Holyoke), Hyde Square Task Force (Boston), and Lawrence Community Works.
100. Relatedly all names of men appearing in the report are pseudonyms in order to ensure participants' anonymity.
101. All criteria and processes described were approved by the Human Subjects Research Board at Worcester State University.
102. Note that the total will not equal 100% as there were respondents who indicated multiple ethno-racial categories.
103. Note that the total will not equal 100% as there were respondents who indicated multiple ethno-racial categories.
104. These are the two years where students have third through eighth and 10th grade outcomes. In earlier years, the MCAS ELA and math were not offered in every grade and in later years, the students have not yet reached 10th grade.



