

# *Nuestro Futuro, Hoy.* An Examination of the Condition, Challenges, and Hopes of Latino Youth in Wyandotte County

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## Methodology and Rationale

This survey seeks to increase community understanding of the needs facing Latino youth, both foreign-born and U.S. native, and to equip El Centro, Inc., other nonprofit organizations, educators, and other interested entities to better develop, administer, and adapt programs to serve this growing population. Few other research efforts adequately and accurately capture this particular subgroup of the youth population in the Kansas City area. While this sample is obviously limited geographically, it has the advantages of encompassing students from across the age range of what is considered 'youth', including students in both public and private school settings as well as out-of-school sites, and using language and culturally-appropriate instruments to facilitate participation among both recent immigrants and lifelong Kansas City residents. For comparison purposes, other research is referenced in this report, including the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation youth report, which, in its most recent edition, was comprised of 6% Hispanic youth (compared to 8% of the total youth population which is Hispanic), all surveyed in English.

The survey sample consists of 413 youth of Hispanic origin, all surveyed within Wyandotte County, Kansas. Sixty-nine percent of the youth respondents were surveyed through three schools within the Kansas City, Kansas school district (USD500). These schools were J.C. Harmon High School, Argentine Middle School, and Central Middle School. Approximately 22% of the students were surveyed at Bishop Ward High School, also in Kansas City, Kansas, a Catholic high school for grades 9-12. And 9% were surveyed outside of a school context, through a recreational or church-based program affiliated with El Centro, Inc. or the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas. All respondents had a choice between an English or Spanish survey. The surveys were four pages long, comprised of 57 questions. Questions were developed by the author and El Centro youth staff, with consultation from Latino youth and other service providers. Youth respondents completed the surveys independently, and all responses were anonymous.

There were some areas of significant difference between students enrolled in the private school and those in USD500, although the significant differences in length of tenure in both Kansas City and the United States for these two populations, with public school students considerably newer to the area, as well as other demographic distinctions, make it impossible to attribute any causality for these differences to the different school environments. Still, Bishop Ward students, when compared with their counterparts in the public school setting, miss significantly fewer days of school each month ( $t=2.552$ ) and are older when they first use alcohol ( $t=2.738$ ), among other distinctions. Perhaps future research could utilize control groups to compare similar cohorts of families and youth in both public and private school settings in order to determine the extent to which school, versus family, characteristics, drive these differences.

## Demographics

The small sample of older teens, influenced by fewer high school respondents but also reflective of Latino demographics, with children more heavily concentrated in younger grades, made some analyses of these students impossible.

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

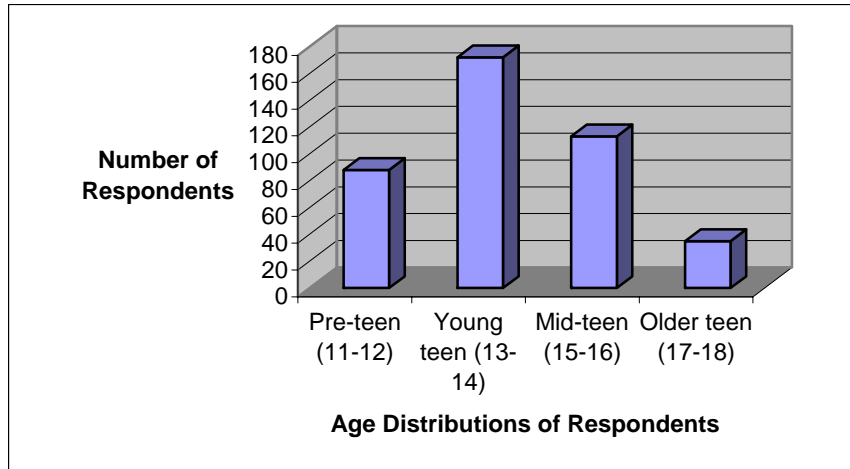


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

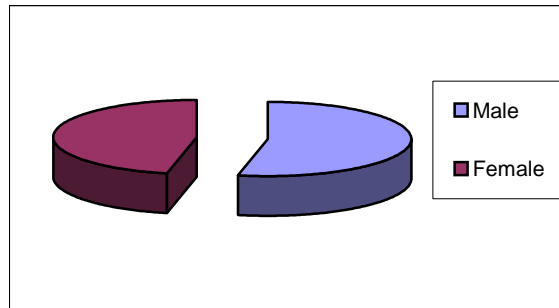
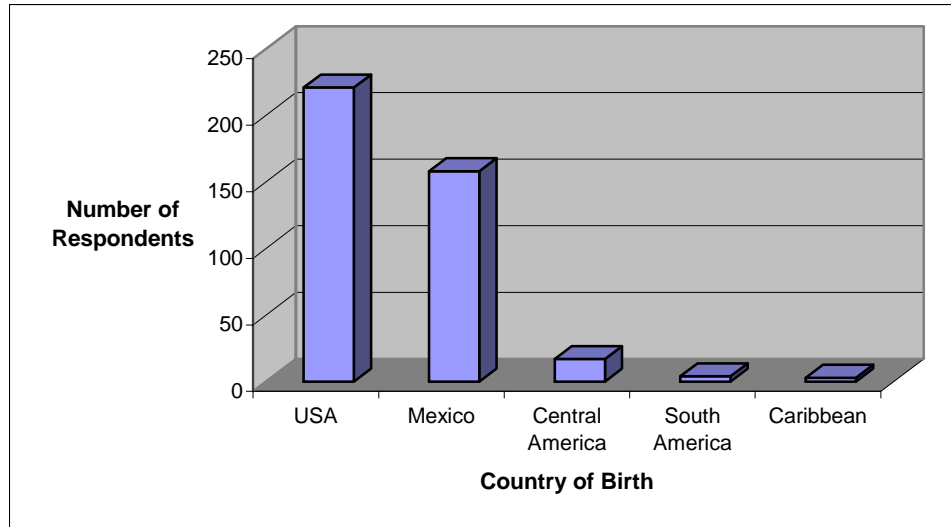


Table 1: Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

	Percent of Survey Respondents	Percent Latino <sup>1</sup>
Kansas City, Missouri	2.5%	6.9%
66101	14.5%	38%
66102	39.2%	32%
66103	8.7%	30%
66104	4.1%	7%
66105	3.4%	60%
66106	12.6%	23%
66109	1.5%	4%
66112	.7%	9%
Johnson County, Kansas	1.6%	4.0%

Figure 3: Country of Birth of Survey Respondents

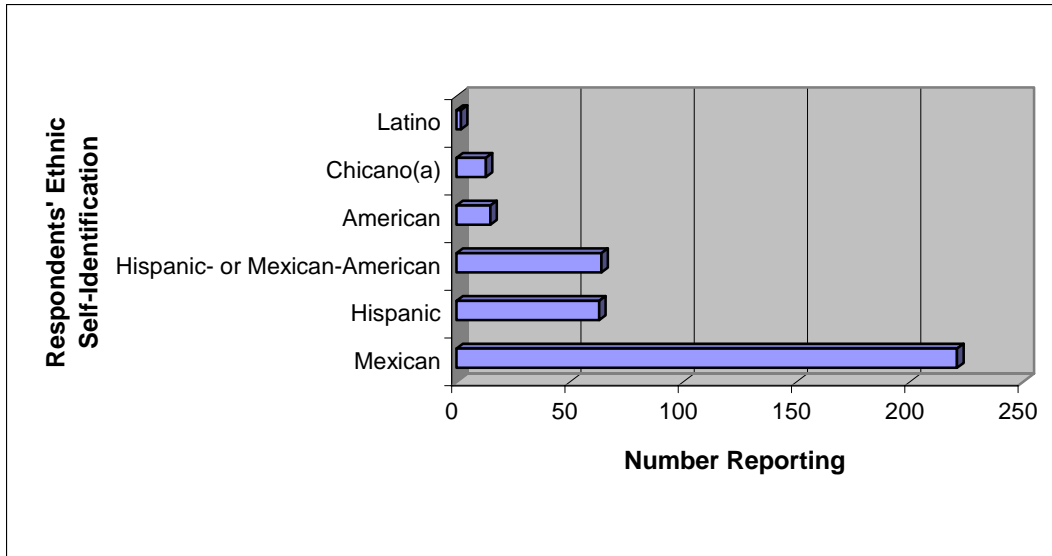
<sup>1</sup> 2004 estimates based on 2000 Census data.



The median number of years in the United States for those not born in the U.S. was 5 years, and the median number of years in the Kansas City area for all respondents was also five years. The comparison in these tenures indicates that many of those born in the U.S. have more recently located in Kansas City, and, in fact, their unsolicited comments about place of birth confirm this, with many reporting having been born in California or Texas, in particular.

Because inclusion and integration into the larger community are priorities for those working with Latino youth, these students' ethnic identifications are of interest. Here, the relative dominance of 'Mexican' as a self-identity is notable not only from what it says about how these youth view themselves within the U.S. context but also because native U.S.-born youth were just as likely to identify as Mexican as those actually born in Mexico. Certainly, given the high level of stigma historically attached with native language and culture for many immigrant groups in the United States, this significant demonstration of ethnic pride and identification with one's family's national roots are notable, and likely reflect youths' responses to changing cultural pressures and norms about acceptance of diversity.

Figure 4: Respondents' Ethnic Self-Identification



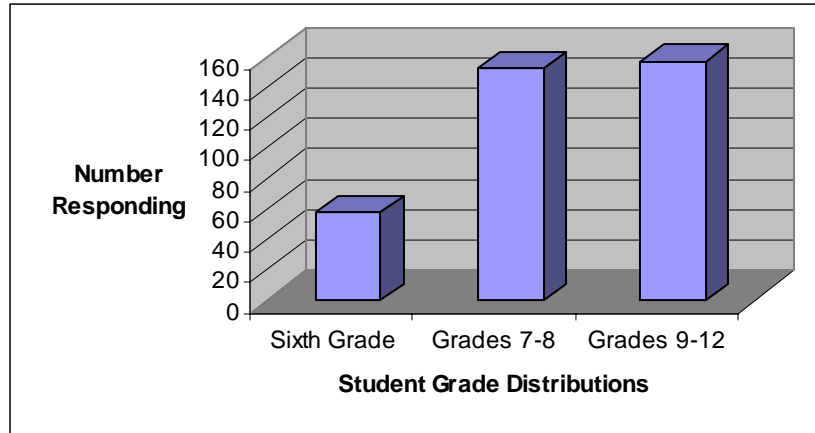
A majority of youth respondents (64%) live with both of their parents, widely perceived to be a protective factor. Parental education levels are relatively low, however, with only 46% of parents graduating from high school and 17% graduating from college. For foreign-born youth, these figures are not surprisingly even lower, at 39% and 12%, respectively (compared to 52% and 20% for parents of native U.S.-born youth). Given that youth whose parents hold a Bachelor's degree are roughly twice as likely to enroll in college immediately after high school compared with those whose parents have less than a high school diploma, these low rates of parental education clearly speak to a need for support and mentoring of these Latino students in order to assist them in overcoming the challenges common to all first-generation college students, in addition to those unique to their situations as language and ethnic minorities.

Despite these challenges, however, parents seem fairly involved in their children's education, with 79% of respondents reporting that their parents attend parent-teacher conferences or other school events at least somewhat regularly. This compares very favorably with surveys of parents in the Kansas City area, where 38% of parents of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 27% of parents of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 22% of parents of 12<sup>th</sup> graders attend school conferences (*Voices of Youth*, 2005). For those respondents who are foreign-born, parental participation rates are astonishingly high, at almost 87%, compared to 74% of native U.S.-born youths' parents.

Over 76% of respondents have extended family members living in the Kansas City area, as well, indicating at least the theoretical availability of additional adult role models and caregivers to form a supportive network for youth. However, without exploring these relationships and their impact in greater detail, it is difficult to determine the extent to which they actually serve as part of a protective circle for these youth as they grow.

### Academic Characteristics

Figure 5: Grade Distributions of Survey Respondents

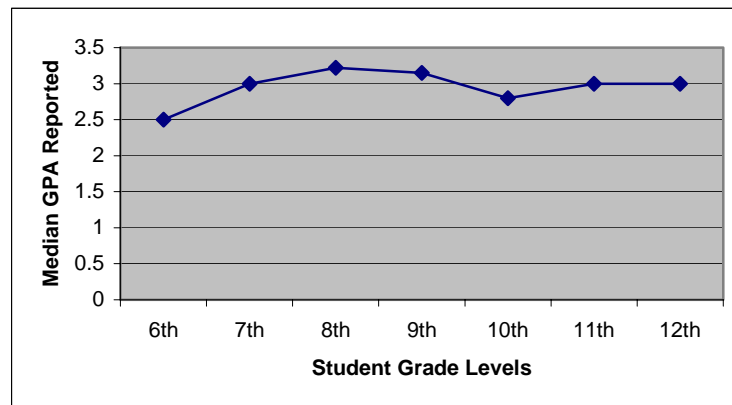


A minority of these Latino respondents, 33%, were enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language classes at the time of survey completion. There were no significant gender differences in students' likelihood of being in dedicated ESL classes, although girls were slightly less likely to be so enrolled (at 29%). Not surprisingly, many more foreign-born respondents were enrolled in ESL (53%); here, it is perhaps the fact that only a slight majority is so enrolled that is of greatest interest. Slightly more than half of the students chose to take the survey in English, although certainly even many of those surveyed in Spanish are also proficient in English, at least as suggested by their GPAs and nonparticipation in ESL programs. The survey did not ask students to rate their own English proficiency, a failing that should be remedied in future research, especially because much evidence suggests that English proficiency correlates strongly with not only academic achievement but also other protective behaviors, especially school completion. Nor did it determine the intensity of the English-as-a-Second-Language experience for students, based on the number of hours per week and the type of ESL instruction. Almost 40% of Latino dropouts do not speak English well, and the dropout rate for those with poor English skills is 59% (Fry, 2003). Interestingly, some survey respondents who were born in the United States indicated ongoing need for English-as-a-Second-Language instruction, while some fairly recent immigrants had already 'graduated' from such programs. Nationally, 17% of Hispanic children ages 10-17 have difficulty speaking English (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Certainly, it is important to question whether the native U.S.-born students in ESL classes are receiving the necessary assistance to transition out of that environment, given their many years of exposure to academic English.

Respondents' median grade point average was 3.0, with a mean of 2.9, indicating that most students are earning grades consistent with academic advancement. There were no statistically significant differences in GPA based on gender ( $t=-1.543$ ), parental college attainment ( $t=.628$ ), or students' own plans to attend college ( $t=.310$ ), nor were the GPAs of foreign-born and U.S. native youth significantly different. There was also not any clear pattern of GPA by student grade level, as shown in the figure below. While some students indicated serious absenteeism, with as many as 15 days missed in some months of school, overall it does not appear that absenteeism is epidemic for these youth. The median number of days missed per month is 1.5, with a slightly higher mean of 2.09 days. Students who indicated that they have considered dropping out of school, however, did report significantly greater absenteeism than those without such thoughts ( $t=2.540$ ). This indicates that, while most students' absenteeism is within reasonable levels, there appears to be at least some link

between days missed of school and increasing disconnection from school, pointing to the need to be vigilant about absenteeism and truancy as risk factors for dropout.

Figure 6: Student Median GPAs by Grade Level



Frequent changes of school do not appear to be huge factors in disrupting these Latino students' educations. Only 8% of students had changed schools within the past six months (10% for those foreign-born), and 19% within the past twelve months (22% for the foreign-born). Some of those who had changed schools within the past twelve months, of course, did so as part of the normal transition from elementary school to middle school or middle school to high school, making the six month figures a more accurate representation of school disruption. These relatively low rates are especially important given some studies that have found that Latino students are negatively affected by school mobility. A study in California found that, among Latino secondary students, 89% of those who made no school changes graduated from high school, compared to 63% of those who made one school change, and 60% of those who made two or more (Rumberger, 1998). More than 50% of dropouts moved during the 4-year study period, compared to 15% of graduates. Nearly 25% of dropouts changed schools 2 or more times.<sup>2</sup>

In looking at other risk factors for school failure and dropout, though, some areas of concern emerge. Approximately 19% of these respondents have considered dropping out of school before graduation. This is slightly higher for girls (approximately 20%) than for boys (18%), and for those foreign-born (21%). Over one-fourth (28%) report that they do not feel respected by their teachers, and 32% have difficulty communicating with their teachers at least some of the time, either because of language or cultural barriers. More than 36% of students report feeling unsafe at their school. And over two-thirds (68%) have experienced or heard anti-Hispanic and/or anti-immigrant comments at their school, from faculty, administrators, and/or other students. These factors were mixed for foreign-born students who had greater difficulties communicating with teachers than native U.S.-born respondents (40% compared to 26%), but were more likely to report feeling respected by teachers and safe at school. They were also less likely to report experiencing or observing anti-Hispanic and/or anti-immigrant comments or attitudes, but some of this could be explained by language barriers which may make it more difficult for some immigrant students to correctly interpret communication with non-Spanish speakers.

<sup>2</sup> Educational Testing Services (2000). *Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States*.

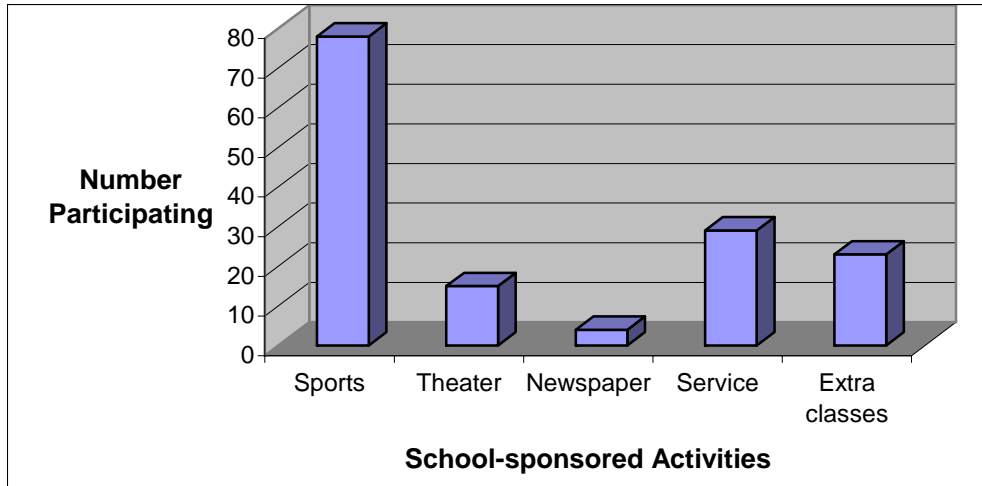
Obviously, because this is a cross-sectional survey that cannot predict students' long-term school performance or their likelihood of early school exit, it cannot illuminate the discussion on dropout rates for Latino students, the factors contributing to school failure, and successful strategies for addressing these risks. Methodological challenges prohibited the surveying of large numbers of students outside the school setting, and, in particular, made it difficult to find and survey youth who fit the target demographic and had already dropped out of school. Given that nearly 40% of Hispanic students who drop out do so before the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, it is likely that this sample will never become representative of those at greatest risk for dropout. The survey did address several of the known risk factors themselves, including academic achievement, truancy, and work patterns, but others were not included, for example, disciplinary problems, tardiness, and overall attitudes towards school. Also, it is likely that there is some distortion in this sample in terms of the school characteristics that are known to contribute to student dropout (sometimes considered 'push out'), as these school administrators had to agree voluntarily to participate in the survey and are generally known for being relatively attuned to the needs of Latino students.

Few students in the survey had ever dropped out of school, as is to be expected for a sample largely collected at school sites. Of those students who had dropped out at some point (7 total), only 1 dropped out for a reason other than a temporary disruption during the migration process. While these youth all returned to school, it would be surprising if these disruptions did not negatively affect the academic experience, permanently interrupting it for some. This is reflected in national data, which suggest that dropout rates cited for Latino students often include recent immigrants who never enroll in U.S. schools (Fry, 2003).

### **Participation in School and Community-based Activities**

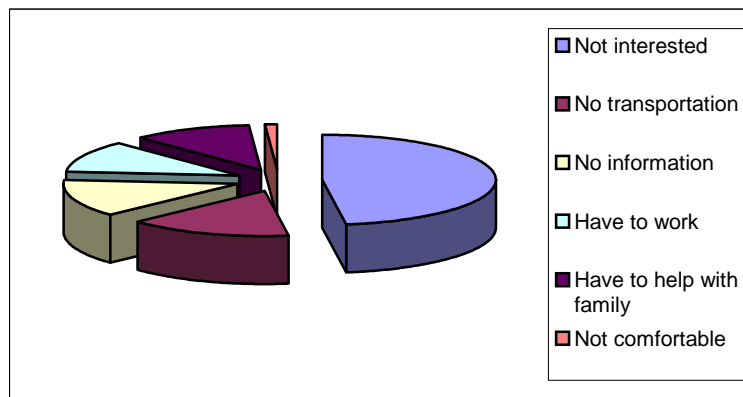
Participation in after-school activities is known to provide youth with safe recreational opportunities during critical afternoon and early evening hours, to help students develop key skills, and to support academic achievement. Few student respondents (38%) are participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities. This figure is even lower for foreign-born students, at only 24%, less than half the participation rate of native U.S.-born youth, at 50%. Even fewer respondents (34%) participate in any enrichment activities beyond the school setting, but this is actually somewhat higher for foreign-born youth, at 38%. All of these rates are significantly lower than for other youth. In the Kansas City area, 79% of boys and 69% of girls had participated in sports in either the school or community contexts in the past 7 days and approximately 55% participating in non-sports school-related activities (Voices of Youth, 2005).

Figure 7: Respondents' Participation in School-sponsored Activities



Student respondents gave many reasons for not participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, as shown below.

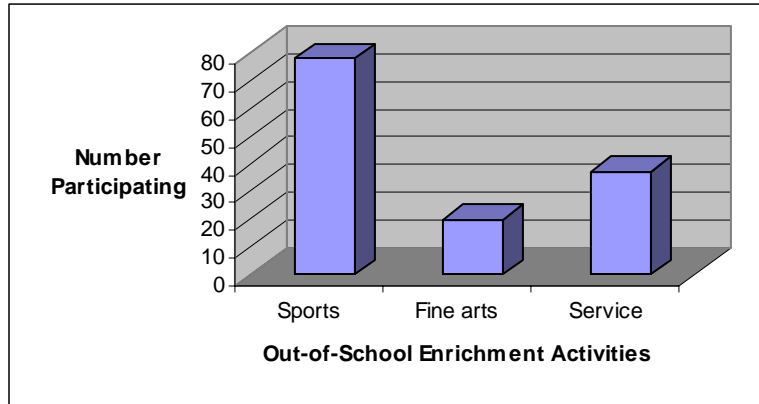
Figure 8: Respondents' Reasons for Not Participating in School-sponsored Activities



Considerable research has documented the negative impact on students of lack of participation in extracurricular activities.<sup>3</sup> There is at least some evidence that youth in this sample are similarly affected. For example, those who participate in school-sponsored activities miss significantly fewer days of school per month than those not engaged ( $t=-2.345$ ). However, other relationships, such as delayed first use of alcohol and/or drugs and higher Grade Point Averages, were not found in these data. Also of note is the lack of difference in participation rates by age for youth in this survey, whereas, in most other analyses, participation in after school activities, in particular, declines with age, often quite sharply (for example, Fletcher, Nickerson, & Wright, 2003).

Figure 9: Respondents' Participation in Out-of-School Enrichment Activities

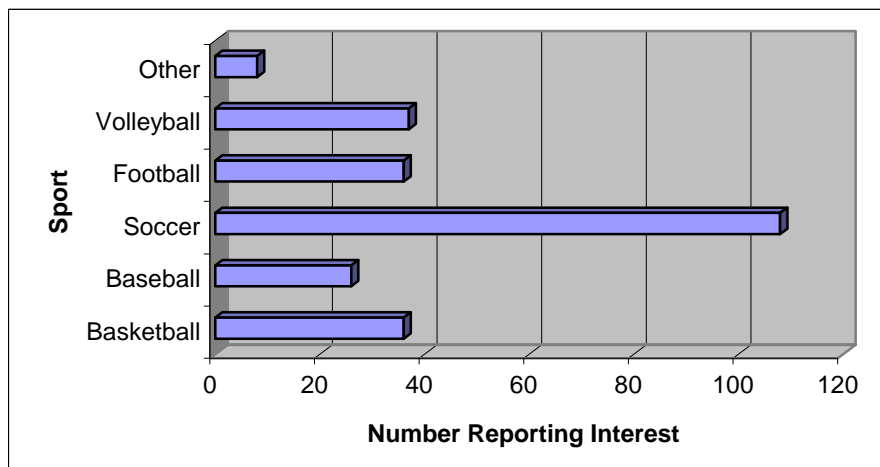
<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Adolescent Time Use and Risky Behavior by Nicholas Zill, Christine Winquist Nord, and Laura Spencer Loomis (1995). Available from [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)



Many more male youth than females report participating in out-of-school enrichment activities (48% compared to 32%). This may be related to the fact that athletics were overwhelmingly the most common type of after school activity and, while gains have been made in athletic participation by teenage girls, males and male-oriented sports still predominate. The reasons given for lack of participation in out-of-school activities were largely the same as for school-based ones, with the largest number of students citing lack of interest, followed by the barriers to participation of lack of transportation, lack of information, work responsibilities, and childcare responsibilities, respectively. These responses suggest that schools and organizations need to examine their program offerings and reach out to Latino youth to address not only structural barriers to participation but also perceptions and preferences that may serve to hinder students' participation as well.

Despite the stated lack of interest in these extra activities, a majority of respondents (62%) claim that they would like to participate in sports in the community, if such offerings were more readily available. These outlets are important in the lives of many youth, but low-income and minority students are less likely to participate for a variety of reasons, including the associated fees. These responses speak to the importance of such entities as the Parks and Recreation Departments, athletic clubs, and other youth-serving organizations recognizing the existing barriers to participation and embarking on concerted outreach campaigns and considering program design with an eye towards the specific needs of these young people.

Figure 10: Respondents' Interest in Community-based Athletics, by sport



Encouragingly, 91% of respondent Latino youth report having friends who are not Latino, indicating both relatively high degrees of integration into the larger community and, it is hoped, relatively few of the cultural and language barriers that often keep adult immigrants, in particular, isolated. As would be expected, this was slightly lower for foreign-born youth, at 88%, likely given the same language and cultural barriers cited above. Other research suggests that these peer relationships are anything but deliberate, however, as only 39% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 29% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders place importance on having friends of all races (Voices of Youth, 2005).

Despite evidence of integration at the peer level, however, youth respondents are not tremendously well connected to other community institutions and resources. Only 53% have a library card, for example, and only 45% have used the public library within the past six months. When asked why they did not use the library, the majority of students responded that they do not like to read and do not, then, see a need or interest in using library services. This again reiterates a challenge for many organizations that offer services, to develop and market programs that will entice these Latino youth. Seventy-three percent of respondents' parents belong to a church, but only 65% report that they attend services with their parents at least somewhat often. This appears to be much higher, however, than for other youth in the area, where only approximately one-third report attending church services (Voices of Youth, 2005). Sixty percent are satisfied with the recreational opportunities available in their neighborhoods, though, and 73% report that they perceive their neighborhoods to be safe, likely leading to 76% of respondents reporting that they like their neighborhoods. Interestingly, the reasons that they give for liking their neighborhoods are many of the same ones often cited by adults and even community development professionals: quiet, peaceful atmosphere; close to amenities; friendly neighbors and a sense of community; and well-maintained houses. Similarly, many of their dissatisfactions with their neighborhoods also mirror those of adults: excessive noise and/or traffic; graffiti and/or litter; inadequate maintenance; and, especially, crime. Perhaps reflecting a relatively high degree of residential segregation in the Kansas City area, anti-immigrant or anti-Hispanic comments seem somewhat less frequent within students' neighborhoods than in their schools, with only 59% reporting witnessing or receiving such messages in their communities.

### **Risk-taking Behavior**

Forty-two percent of respondents have had contact with the police in the Kansas City area. Of these, 64% feel that they were treated with respect in the encounter. More exploration is needed to examine the nature of this conflict, what was unsatisfactory to the youth, and what their attitudes were about law enforcement before and after the contact. Despite these relatively positive interactions with police (and several students who state that law enforcement is a part of their future career goals) only 17% would report a friend who is involved in gang activity to the police. Approximately 11% of students report that they have been bullied within the past month, while almost 18% state that they have themselves bullied another student during this same time period. Not surprisingly, younger students were more likely to report being victimized, although there was no statistically significant difference in age for victims and non-victims. This appears relatively consistent with figures for the overall Kansas City youth population, where bullying victimization ranges from 13% for 12<sup>th</sup> graders to 27% for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. In the larger population as well, students were more likely to report bullying others than being bullied themselves, although shame could play a role in influencing reporting in this area.

Only 11% of the students have smoked cigarettes, with the median age for onset of smoking 12 years (mean=11.2 years) (and many youth volunteering that their age of first smoking was also their age of last smoking). As has been found in other analyses, smoking is even less common among immigrant teens; only 9% of those born outside the United States have ever used cigarettes, compared to slightly more than 13% of native U.S.-born youth. It appears, then, that tobacco use is relatively low among this Latino youth population, certainly when compared to use of alcohol and other drugs and when compared to tobacco use among other teens. Various reports from the Kansas City area find that between 13-24% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 25-45% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders have ever smoked cigarettes (Voices of Youth, 2005 and Partnership for Children Report Card). For the survey sample, cigarette usage appears relatively unchanged as youth age—17% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the sample, for example, compared to 19% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, report ever smoking cigarettes. Girls are only slightly more likely than boys to have used cigarettes (12% compared to 10%). Future analyses should attempt to understand why these youth are not smoking in order to determine how to build on these protective factors for other prevention efforts.

Forty-two percent of youth respondents have used alcohol, with a median age of onset of 12 years. Only 11% of those who have used alcohol report that they use it weekly, but more than 43% report that their parents know that they use alcohol, indicating at least some parental acceptance of teenage drinking. A majority of those who have used alcohol have done so within the past year, with many citing usage at celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo parties, quinceñeras, and other family and community events. While the rates for alcohol usage appear somewhat lower than the overall youth population in Kansas City, other research suggests that Hispanic young people are more likely to drink and to get drunk at an earlier age than other youth.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3: Alcohol Use

	Survey--Have used alcohol	KC Youth—Have used alcohol
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	30%	61%
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	71%	79%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Could not evaluate	85%
All foreign-born respondents	31%	NA
All native U.S.-born respondents	51%	NA

Twenty-one percent of respondents have used drugs, beginning at a slightly older age (median for first use=13 years; mean=12.4 years). Male youth are slightly more likely to have used drugs than females, at 23% compared to 20%.

Table 4: Drug Use

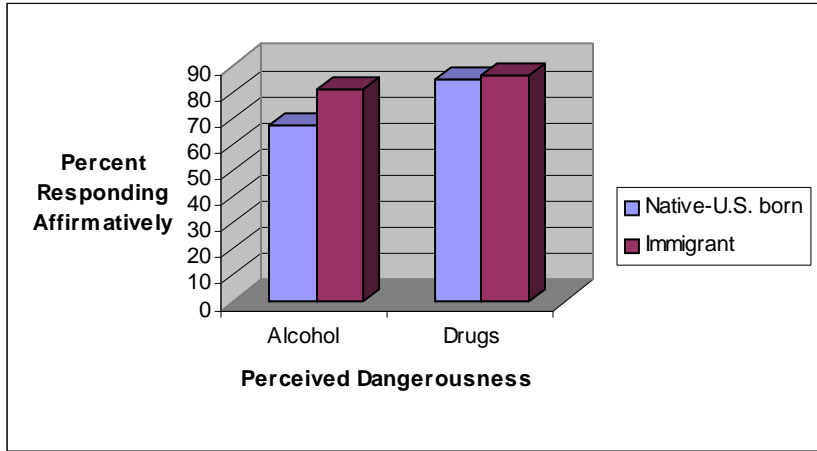
	Have used drugs
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12%
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	42%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Could not evaluate
All foreign-born respondents	16%

<sup>4</sup> Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., and Bachman, J.G., Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2001, Volume 1: Secondary School Students (Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2002), Table 4-9.

All native U.S.-born respondents	24%
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Marijuana is the most commonly used drug, at 91% of users, followed by cocaine 7.2%, and speed 1.4%. Disturbingly, 11.5% of those who have used drugs report that they do so at least once per week. Far fewer parents are aware of this drug use, with only 19% reporting that their parents know about their past or current use of drugs.

Figure 11: Respondents' Perception of Alcohol and Drugs as Dangerous



Most likely reflecting cultural beliefs not only within the Latino community but also within society as a whole, youth respondents were much more likely to perceive drugs as posing dangers for users than alcohol, although both were perceived as dangerous by a majority of respondents. Also consistent with other research are data that find that foreign-born youth are more risk-averse than those born in the United States, particularly when it comes to alcohol usage, as demonstrated above.

Respondents were almost equally likely to learn about sex and sexuality at home, from parents (56%), and from school (52%), although only slight majorities report learning about sex in either setting. Certainly this does reflect some growth on the part of Latino families, however, given that discussion of sexuality within the family context has historically been relatively rare for this population. The percentage of respondents who lack opportunities to learn about and discuss sexuality with trusted adults is important, as research suggests that Latino teens whose parents closely monitor their behavior and disapprove of early sexual activity are more likely to be virgins (Hovell, 1994). Foreign-born youth are much less likely to learn about sex in school, at only 43% (compared to 61% of native U.S.-born youth), likely because of language barriers and scheduling factors such as pullout ESL instruction. They are just as likely to discuss sexuality with their parents, though, with 57% report having done so. Twenty percent of respondents report being currently sexually active, with 82% of these youth report practicing safer sex on a regular basis. In another indication of risk aversion, only 14% for foreign-born youth, compared to 25% of native U.S.-born youth, report being sexually active. Despite relatively high rates of risk reduction through use of contraceptives, sexually active youth are fairly concerned about the risks associated with sexual activity; 68% are worried about pregnancy and 54% about HIV/AIDS. As would be expected, sexually active teens are significantly older than those who have never had sex ( $t=7.724$ ). Approximately 37% of youth who are sexually active report that their parents know about their sexual activity. Surprisingly, male respondents (27%) report much higher levels of sexual activity than do

females (15%), which contrasts with commonly-held views that Latina teenage girls are sexually involved at much higher rates (often with older partners) than Latino male youth. Nationally, Latino youth are more likely than non-Latino white youth and less likely than African-American youth to have ever had sex (Grunbaum, 2002).

Almost 9% of respondents report that they are members of gangs (this is higher for males, at 11%, than for females, at approximately 6%, as would be expected). Another 38% have been asked to join a gang but have not yet done so. Encouragingly, of those who are not members of gangs, only 6% report that they would like to join. However, gang activity is certainly a part of these youths' lives, with more than 70% reporting that they have a friend or acquaintance who is a member of a gang. Future research should examine not only the age at which youth are most likely to become involved in gang activity, in order to best target both prevention and intervention activities, but also more in-depth discussions with youth about the factors that lead to their affiliations with gangs and their experiences as gang members.

### **Employment**

Twenty-two percent of youth respondents are employed. Male youth (29%) are almost twice as likely to be employed than females (15%). Of those who are employed, 24% feel that their job interferes with their schoolwork, although there was no statistically significant difference in Grade Point Average for employed versus unemployed students ( $t=-.615$ ) nor was there any significant correlation between hours worked per week and grades ( $r=.134$ ), although other analyses have found this. The median number of hours worked per week is 20, with a mean of 18.5 hours per week worked. Native U.S.-born youth, while demonstrating similar rates of employment, work far fewer hours per week, at only 14.5. These employment rates are much lower than rates for youth overall, likely influenced by a variety of factors, including residence in urban areas with relatively high unemployment rates, lack of lawful immigration status, and the relative youth of this survey sample (although, nationally 50% of youth ages 12 and 13 report working at least some for pay (BLS, 2005)). Nationally, approximately 80% of youth report holding jobs during their high school years (NCSET, 2003). Because the survey only captured those youth who are currently employed, it is possible that labor participation rates for these Latino youth are higher in the summer, resulting in a greater overall annual employment rate. Still, it is clear that these youth work less for pay than the national averages, where 18% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 39% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 66% 12<sup>th</sup> graders are attached to the labor market year-round (BLS, 2005). This is mirrored by national trends that suggest that non-Hispanic White youth have the highest employment rates, trailed by Black and then Hispanic youth. It seems that Kansas City youth have relatively lower rates of work participation than those in other parts of the country, as well. Here, only 15% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 42% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders work for pay after school (Voices of Youth, 2005). Hours of work per week seem relatively consistent for the survey sample, however, when compared with other youth, seeming to hover around twenty hours per week for many.

### **Plans and Concerns for the Future**

Seventy-eight percent of respondents plan to attend college (74% for foreign-born youth compared to 81% of those born in the U.S.). As is seen in other local and national research, female students are more strongly oriented towards higher education than males, at 85% to 74%. Only 43% of students, however, report that they are aware of legislation in Kansas that facilitates postsecondary educational attainment among immigrant students by making them eligible, in certain situations, for instate tuition rates. Rather than being greater among the immigrant population at whom the

legislation is directed, however, only 41% of foreign-born respondents indicate that they knew about this law's existence. And only 49% of respondents report that they have received any assistance with their college preparations, in terms of choosing a career and a school, understanding financing, and even planning their current academic course load with an eye towards additional schooling. Again, given low levels of parental education and their impact on students' preparations for college themselves, it is critical that school and community leaders step in to guide young people as they face decisions about their futures. For example, because parental education influences educational behaviors in children that impact their later opportunities, including taking college entrance exams and choosing college-preparatory courses (NCES, 2001), these Latino families will need assistance in shaping their children's educational experience so as to prepare them for postsecondary success. Families with lower levels of parental education also know the least about the price of attending college and available financial aid.

Respondents expressed a wide variety of future career interests, as is shown below. However, most youth did not give any specific career plans, reflecting that most may have given relatively little thought to their futures.

Career	Number Reporting Plans	Career	Number Reporting Plans
Accounting	2	Business/Finance	12
Mechanic	12	Fine Arts	4
Law	36	Counseling/social work	4
Medicine	42	Computers	5
Education	13	Cosmetology	10
Architect	8	Veterinarian	10
Law enforcement	14	Culinary	4
Engineering	8		

While fairly 'typical' teenage concerns about grades and friends did figure among survey respondents' comments in response to open-ended questions about their current and future worries, many much larger issues played prominent roles, illustrating some of the greater challenges that these particular young people face. The top concerns, listed in order of frequency, are below. Clearly, helping youth to cope with these concerns must include a strategy of information-sharing and skills training, so that they are equipped with some of the resources to deal with their worries and counseling and social support to handle the emotional fallout of such issues.

Current concerns:

1. Grades/passing
2. Money
3. Family well-being (and specific family concerns)
4. Immigration policy and/or immigration consequences
5. Pregnancy

Concerns for the future:

1. College
2. Finding a job/making enough money
3. Taking care of my family

4. Death
5. Immigration

Few respondents added additional comments, as were solicited at the end of the survey. Among those who did share additional thoughts, immigration concerns were most commonly mentioned, especially among high school students. Several mentioned by name the recent legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 4437, which would make unlawful status in the United States a felony and could lead to deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants. These concerns are obviously quite different than other samples, where sexually transmitted diseases, health, and neighborhood violence figure in somewhat more commonly than for these young people. Some respondents shared struggles with depression, self-esteem, body image, and worries about war. Recent media have focused attention on the particular concerns of young Latinas<sup>5</sup>, including suicidal ideation, that alarm families and professionals working with these youth.

### Implications

Several areas for future research have been suggested, in order to more fully explore these areas with these particular youth as well as to increase the sophistication of the sample. These data suggest that focus groups or other more in-depth, qualitative research may be helpful as a strategy for discussing some of these results and their meanings with students and also allowing for purposeful interactions between native U.S.-born and immigrant youth, in particular. Comparisons between these mostly Wyandotte County Latino youth and those in other parts of the metropolitan area would also be helpful, through expanding the sample to students in Johnson and Jackson counties, at a minimum.

Programmatic modifications and concerted, targeted outreach efforts could help to make significant strides in the goal of surrounding these youth, and all young people, with supportive adults, high-quality development opportunities, and safe alternatives to risk-taking behavior. In particular, it appears that religious institutions may be a viable choice, given these students and their families' relatively high level of familiarity with and affinity for church involvement. Community-based recreational programs appear attractive to these youth and, indeed, have proven successful in similarly vulnerable populations around the country and in other parts of the Kansas City metropolitan area. A particular priority should be placed on serving older youth through intervention programs, as most of those involved in risk-taking behavior were concentrated in grades 9-12. This will require thoroughly exploring the types of programming that will capture the interests of these older youth and a reexamination of the emphasis, with a shift from the kinds of 'pure prevention' programs that are often targeted at younger youth quite successfully to those that can engage even those who have already begun to experience difficulties with school and to experiment with dangerous activities. It is also clear that programs should be developed to meet the specific needs of U.S. native and foreign-born youth, as those designed for one population will be unlikely to address the risk and protective factors of the other. U.S. native youth, in particular, need culturally specific and appropriate, yet most likely English-language, programming, a need often unmet as most programming with Latino communities tends to focus on language accommodations as the primary strategy to reach diverse groups. Perhaps the greatest outcome of this research would be a true examination of the resources and investments needed to comprehensively invest in youth in the Kansas City area, including our Latino young people, and the beginning of a conversation about

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Adler, E. "In a bright new land, dark thoughts emerge," April 17, 2006. [The Kansas City Star](#).

what it could mean to connect the disparate efforts currently underway, fully fund the most promising initiatives, and make youth development a regional priority for leaders in the corporate, nonprofit, educational, and governmental sectors.

Many concerned organizations and individuals have been laboring for years to identify policy solutions to address the problems of high school dropout, teenage substance abuse, and other challenges that interfere with youth development during these critical years. Clearly, these efforts must continue, but these data also make clear that they must include specific understanding of and accounting for the unique perspectives, backgrounds, and obstacles of Latino students, with an eye towards how these are different for those born in the U.S. versus immigrant youth. Specific policy implications relevant to these youth include the need to reform our immigration laws to avoid family separation and the obvious anxiety that comes with its threat for these youth, as well as additional efforts to address the needs of first-generation college students, including increased financial aid and funding for mentoring programs. Disturbingly, it appears that the federal budget is headed in the opposite direction in these areas, considering cuts to many of the academic and social support programs that have helped at-risk students to succeed in college.

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