

**The Campaign for Educational Equity**

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

**EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY  
AND THE LATINO POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES**

By

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## Executive Summary

This research report examines the comparative educational condition of Latinos in the United States. The report discusses the dramatic shortfalls that plague the educational outcomes of Latinos relative to other racial and ethnic groups. The outcomes studied include educational attainment, school and university enrollment, basic cognitive skills, student achievement and advanced academic skills, non-cognitive skills, political and civic participation, and labor market outcomes. The report then proceeds to examine the main reasons for these inequities, discussing the comparative status of Latinos in terms of the three basic forces or inputs affecting schooling: socioeconomic background, the family and parental involvement, and the condition of pre-schooling and schooling.

Latinos constitute one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States, due to high rates of immigration as well as high comparative fertility rates. This growth has led Latinos to become the largest racial and ethnic minority in the country: 44 million strong, as estimated by the U.S. Bureau of the census in 2006. And associated with this population increase is also a rise in the school age population. In 2006, there were over 10 million Latinos in the 5 to 17 years of age range, compared to close to 30 million Whites and 8 million Blacks/African Americans. In some parts of the U.S., the concentration of Latinos has led to a massive presence in schools. In 2005, about half of all students in the California public school system were Latinos and in New Mexico, Latinos accounted for 54 percent of all children in the public school system. In New York State, the corresponding percentage was 18 percent.

There is considerable diversity within the Latino population, and different groups have divergent educational situations. In terms of ethnicity, the largest Latino group by far is the Mexican or Mexican American population, which the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated to be at 28 million in 2006. This is followed by 4 million Puerto Ricans, one and a half million Cubans and Salvadorians each, 1.3 million Dominicans, and close to a million Colombians. Latinos diverge as well in terms of their place of birth. About 44 percent of all Latinos were born outside the United States and are thus immigrants. The remaining Latinos were born in the United States, constituting a second, or older, generation.

The overall Latino population faces serious challenges in education. There is a considerable shortfall in most of the various educational outcomes of Latinos measured in this study, when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

The average Latino with 25 years of age or older had 11 years of schooling in 2005, which is the lowest in the country, compared to 13.8 years among Whites, 13 years among Blacks/African Americans and 14.2 years among Asians. There are differences among Latino groups, though, with Cubans and Colombians having higher educational attainment while Mexicans and Salvadorians having lower schooling. In addition, the educational attainment of immigrant Latinos is substantially lower than that of the second and older generations.

The school enrollment rates of Latino children do not diverge significantly from those of other

racial and ethnic groups until they reach 15 years of age. After that age, however, Latino enrollment rates decline significantly compared to other groups. Indeed, Latino high school dropout rates are currently the highest in the nation, more than three times higher than those of Whites and twice those of Blacks and African Americans.

The situation is magnified through the educational pipeline. Latinos tend to enroll in community colleges at rates exceeding those of other racial and ethnic groups, which tend to prefer four-year colleges. Their graduation rates from community colleges are also lower. And as one moves to higher levels of education—four-year colleges, and graduate and professional schools.—the presence of Latinos dwindles even more. Only 10.5 percent of all students enrolled in degree-granting colleges and universities were Latinos (compared to 66.1 percent for Whites and 12.5 percent for Blacks and African Americans) and only 2.8 percent of faculty employed in these institutions was Latino.

The basic literacy skills of Latinos are significantly lower than those of other racial and ethnic groups. As measured by adult literacy surveys, both the reading proficiency and the basic quantitative literacy skills of the average adult Latino were the lowest in the U.S. in 2003. And a smaller fraction of Latinos are able to display advanced literacy skills. As measured by adult literacy surveys: only 4 percent of Latinos in 2003 were catalogued as mastering advanced literacy skills, compared to 13 percent of the overall American population.

For children in school, student achievement among Latinos in public schools—as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress—is substantially below the average for the country. And this achievement even declines as the grade of the student increases. Only about 10 percent of all Latinos take advanced placement high school courses. And the average SAT score among Latinos in the 2004-2005 academic year was 463 in the verbal part and 469 in the quantitative part, compared to average SAT scores of 508 in the verbal part and 520 in the quantitative part for the overall population taking the exams.

The inequities in schooling suffered by Latinos relative to other groups are not just reflected in indicators of quantity and quality of schooling. Education is also a key determinant of labor market status. Latinos in the labor force tend to have higher unemployment rates as well as lower earnings than the average. According to the 2000 Census of Population, the average annual earnings of employed Latinos 16 years of age or older were about half the average earnings of the average White worker and significantly lower than the average for Black/African American workers.

Educational outcomes are the product of a wide array of forces or inputs. Three major sets of inputs affecting schooling are: socioeconomic background, family and parental involvement, and the resources available to—and the quality of-- pre-schooling and schools.

The average socioeconomic status of Latinos is the lowest of the major racial and ethnic groups in the population. The percentage of Latino families living under the poverty level was 21 percent in 2005 and the percentage of children living in poverty was 31 percent. The corresponding averages for the United States overall were 11 percent and 16 percent. The lower socioeconomic status of the parents of Latino children has an impact on the availability of home

educational resources, such as computers, book collections, etc. In addition, the higher Latino poverty rates lead to lower rates of pre-schooling. The percentage of pre-primary school children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in center-based early childhood programs is the lowest among Latinos when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Many Latino children have Spanish as their first language and the majority of Latino immigrant children were partly educated in school systems abroad, where English was not taught. As a result, the percentage of Latino children aged 5 to 17 who speak English with difficulty stood at 19.5 percent in 2005, way over the equivalent percentage for the overall population. Nevertheless, this proportion declines sharply as Latino children age, and as one moves from immigrants to second and third generations.

Parental involvement of Latinos in school exceeds that of other groups in the population. When asked whether they ever attended a PTA meeting, 74 percent of Latino parents with children in schools replied affirmatively, compared to 59 percent among Whites and 71 percent among Blacks/African Americans. Latino parents also have the highest educational expectations for their children in American society. When asked how important it is for their child to go to college, 95 percent of Latino parents responded that it was important, as compared to 78 percent among Whites and 94 percent among Blacks/African Americans.

The quality of the schooling received by Latino children is significantly lower than that available to the average American student. Partly, this is associated with the low income and high poverty of the school districts where many Latino families reside. It is compounded by the high degree of segregation of Latino students in schools. By any indicator, Latino children suffer from the highest rate of segregation of all racial and ethnic groups. In 2005, a total of 76.3 percent of all Latino children were enrolled in schools with 50 to 100 percent minority children, compared to 10.8 percent among whites and 71.6 percent among Blacks/African Americans.

The research report concludes with policy recommendations intended to bridge the existing shortfalls in the educational status of Latinos. From investments in pre-schooling to the design of school-to-work programs, the report presents a wide array of choices in educational policy arena.

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**Table 1**

**The Population of the United States, 2006**

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Racial and Ethnic Group	Population, 2006	% of Total
United States Total	299,398,485	100.0%
Non-Hispanic White	198,176,991	66.2
Hispanic/Latino	44,252,278	14.8
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	36,434,530	12.2
Asian and Pacific	12,945,401	4.3
Other/Multiracial	7,589,285	2.5

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Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006 American Community Survey.

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**Table 2**

**The School Age Population of the United States, 2006**

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Racial and Ethnic Group	Age 5-17	% of Total
United States Total	53,592,329	100.0%
Non-Hispanic White	31,530,928	58.9
Hispanic/Latino	10,310,781	19.2
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	7,979,162	14.9
Asian and Pacific	2,097,155	3.9
Other/Multiracial	1,674,303	3.1

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Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006 American Community Survey.

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**Table 3**  
**Fourth-Grade Students in U.S. Schools, 2005**

Racial and Ethnic Group	% of Total	California	New Mexico	New York
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Non-Hispanic White	59	31	31	53
Hispanic/Latino	18	49	54	18
Non-Hispanic Black/Af. Am.	16	8	3	20
Asian and Pacific/Other	6	12	12	9

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005.

**Table 4**  
**The Largest Hispanic/Latino Populations in the U.S., 2006**

Population, 2006	
Total Hispanic/Latino Population	44,252,278
Mexican/Mexican American	28,339,354
Puerto Rican	3,987,947
Cuban	1,520,276
Salvadorian	1,513,563
Dominican	1,292,401
Colombian	886,421

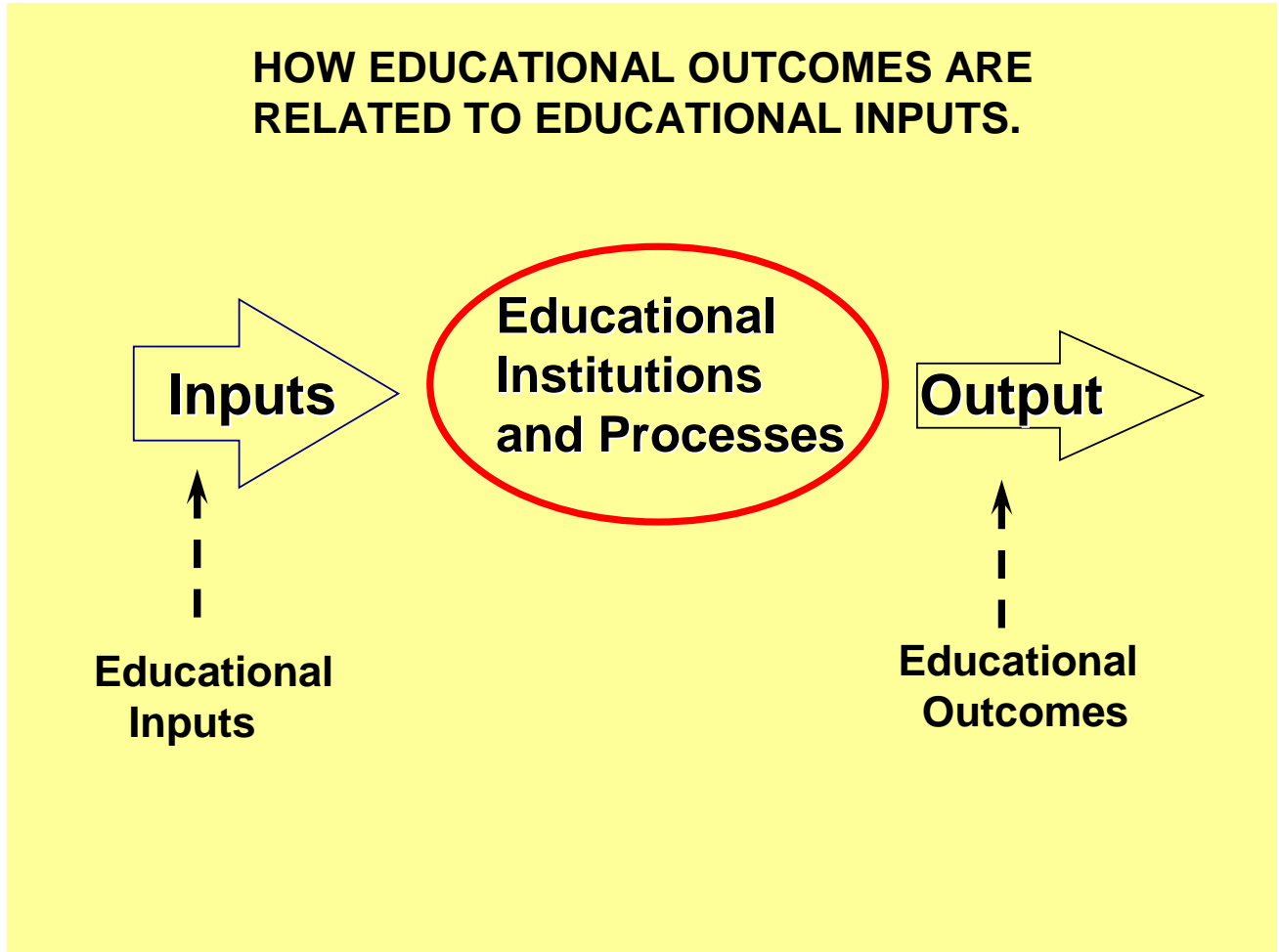
Source: Official count for Mexicans, Puerto Rican and Cuban; author's tabulations for Dominicans, Salvadorians and Colombians. Based on the 2006 American Community Survey.

**Table 5**  
**Immigrant Groups in the Populations of the U.S., 2006**

Racial and Ethnic Group	Population, 2006	% of Total
United States Total	40,718,193	13.6%
Non-Hispanic White	9,116,142	4.6
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	2,914,762	8.0
Asian and Pacific	8,824,647	68.2
Hispanic/Latino	19,545,578	44.1
Mexican/Mexican American	11,675,814	41.2
Puerto Rican	1,383,818	34.7
Cuban	954,733	62.8
Salvadorian	772,439	51.0
Dominican	788,365	61.0
Colombian	634,677	71.6

Source: Puerto Ricans born on the island have been included as part of the immigrant groups.  
Based on the 2006 American Community Survey.

**Figure 1**



**Table 6**  
**Outcomes: Educational Attainment, 2005**

Persons 25 years of age or older

Population Group	Percentage of the Population with:				Schooling:
	Less than High Sch.	High School or GED	Some College	College or More	Average Years
Overall United States	15.8%	29.6%	27.5%	27.1%	13.3
Non-Hispanic White	11.1	30.3	28.7	29.9	13.8
Non-Hispanic Black/ African American	19.8	33.2	29.8	17.2	12.9
Non-Hispanic Asian	12.9	17.5	20.0	49.6	14.2
Hispanic	40.5	27.0	20.2	12.3	11.0
Mexican	47.0	26.7	17.8	8.5	10.4
Puerto Rican	28.9	30.1	25.9	15.1	12.1
Cuban	26.8	26.2	14.8	32.2	12.5
Salvadorian	54.3	23.6	14.3	7.8	9.6
Dominican	38.9	24.9	22.2	14.0	11.3
Colombian	16.1	26.2	24.7	33.0	13.3

**Source:** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 American Community Survey.

**Table 7**

**The Educational Attainment of Latino Immigrants and Native-Born, 2005**

Persons 25 years of age or older

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Population Group	Percentage of the Latino Population with:			Schooling:	
	Less than High Sch.	High School Diploma	Some College	College or More	Average Years
Overall Hispanic	40.5%	27.0%	20.2%	12.3%	11.0
Immigrants	50.6	24.6	14.5	10.3	10.1
Non-Immigrants	22.9	31.1	30.1	15.9	12.5

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**Source:** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 American Community Survey.

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**Table 8**  
**School Enrollment Rates, 6 to 21 Year Olds**

Age Group	Proportion of Children in Age Group Enrolled in School			
	Overall United States		Non-Hispanic White	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
6-11 Years	97.4%	97.5%	97.2%	97.4%
12-14 Years	98.1	98.1	98.1	98.0
15-17 Years	95.4	95.9	96.3	96.4
18-21 Years	54.2	60.8	58.1	64.5
	Non-Hispanic Black		Hispanic/Latino	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
6-11 Years	97.4%	97.5%	97.8%	97.9%
12-14 Years	97.8	98.1	98.3	98.3
15-17 Years	95.2	95.9	91.7	93.9
18-21 Years	50.0	53.9	40.3	49.4
	Non-Hispanic Asian			
	Male	Female		
5-9 Years	97.7%	98.0%		
10-14 Years	99.1	98.0		
15-17 Years	98.5	97.3		
18-19 Years	78.3	81.1		

**Source:** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006 American Community Survey.

**Table 9**  
**School Dropouts and School Delays, 2005**  
 All Persons Aged 18 to 24

	White	Black	Hispanic
Not Enrolled In School	52.0%	57.8%	66.1%
Completed High School	43.6	43.6	38.9
<b>Did Not Complete High School</b> <b>(Estimate of Dropout Rate)</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>27.2</b>
Enrolled in School	48.0%	42.2%	33.9%
<b>Enrolled in High School or Less</b> <b>(Estimate of School Delay)</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>
Enrolled in College or More	38.5	29.3	23.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 American Community Survey.

**Table 10**

Two-Year versus Four-Year College Enrollment, 2004

Racial and Ethnic Group	Two-Year	Four-Year
United States Total	32.9%	67.1%
Non-Hispanic White	31.0	69.0
Hispanic/Latino	43.8	56.2
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	32.5	67.5
Asian and Pacific	15.3	84.7

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

**Table 11**

**The Shrinking Latino Pipeline in Higher Education, 2004**

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	Population Aged 18-24	Associate Degrees	Bachelor's Degrees	Professional Degrees	Doctoral Degrees
Non-Hispanic White	61.7%	68.5%	73.3%	72.7%	58.3%
Hispanic	17.3	10.9	6.8	5.1	3.4
Non-Hispanic Black	15.1	12.2	9.4	7.1	6.0
Non-Hispanic Asian	4.2	5.0	6.6	12.0	5.4

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Source: U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2007.

**Table 12**

**Student Achievement: National Assessment of Educational Progress Results**

Average Scores, Public School Students, 2005

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	Fourth Math	Fourth Reading	Eighth Math	Eighth Reading	Twelfth Math	Twelfth Reading
Overall	238	219	279	267	301	286
Non-Hisp. White	246	229	289	271	308	293
Hispanic	226	203	262	246	283	272
Non-Hisp. Black	220	200	255	243	275	267
Non-Hisp. Asian	251	229	295	271	317	287

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Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2007.

**Table 13**

**Student Achievement: College Entrance Test Scores**

Average Scores, College-Bound Seniors, 2004-2005

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	SAT-Verbal	SAT-Math	ACT Composite
Overall	508	520	20.9
Non-Hispanic White	532	536	21.8
Hispanic/Latino	463	469	18.5
Non-Hispanic Black	433	431	17.1
Non-Hispanic Asian	511	580	21.9

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Source: College Entrance Examination Board, National Report on College-Bound Seniors, 2006; and The American College Testing Program, High School Profile Report, 2006.

**Table 14**

**Basic Skills: Literacy in the United States, 2003**

Persons 25 years of age or older

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	Reading Average Score	Percentage Below Basic	Quantitative Average Score	Percentage Below Basic
Overall U.S.	269	14%	261	22%
Non-Hispanic White	282	7	274	13
Hispanic/Latino	233	44	225	50
Non-Hispanic Black	242	24	226	47
Other (includes Asian)	262	14	262	19

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Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey, 2003.

**Table 15**

**Advanced Skills: Literacy in the United States, 2003**

Persons 25 years of age or older

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	Reading Percentage Proficient	Quantitative Percentage Proficient
Overall U.S.	13%	13%
Non-Hispanic White	17	17
Hispanic/Latino	4	4
Non-Hispanic Black	2	2
Other (includes Asian)	14	12

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Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey, 2003.

**Table 16**

**Advanced Skills: National Assessment of Educational Progress Results**

% of Public School Students Scoring at a Proficient Level or Higher, 2005

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	Fourth Math	Eighth Math	Twelfth Math	Fourth Reading	Eighth Reading	Twelfth Reading
Non-Hisp. White	47%	37%	29%	39%	37%	43%
Hispanic	19	13	8	15	14	20
Non-Hisp. Black	13	8	6	12	11	16
Non-Hisp. Asian	54	46	36	72	39	36

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Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2007.

**Table 17**

**Labor Market Outcomes:**

**Unemployment Rates in the United States,**

Persons 16 years of age or older in the labor force, 2000

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Population Group	Unemployment Rate (%)	
	Male	Female
United States overall	3.9	4.1
Non-Hispanic White	2.8	3.0
Non-Hispanic Black	8.1	7.6
Non-Hispanic Asian	3.2	3.7
Hispanic/Latino	5.4	7.6

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Source: 2000 Census, 5% PUMS.

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**Table 18**

**Labor Market Outcomes:**

**The Annual Earnings of Workers**

Employed persons 16 years of age or older  
New York City, 2000

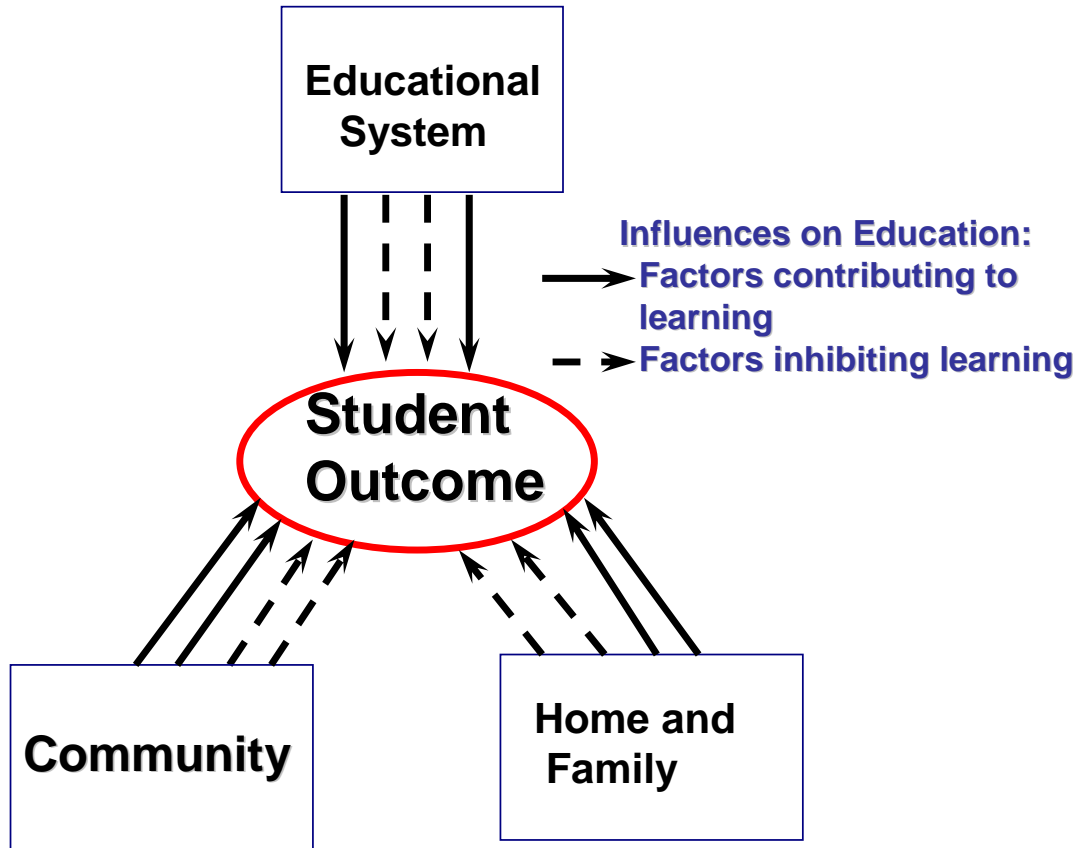
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Population Group	Median Annual Earnings	
	Male	Female
Overall New York City	29,155	24,469
Non-Hispanic White	41,717	31,488
Non-Hispanic Black	26,220	24,882
Hispanic/Latino	20,938	16,300

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Source: 2000 Census, Summary File 4.

Figure 2



**Table 19**

**Inputs: Socioeconomic Status  
Per-Capita Income in the U.S., By Race/Ethnicity**

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	Mean Annual Household Income Per-Capita, 2005
United States Average	25,817
Non-Hispanic White Population	29,595
Hispanic/Latino Population	15,341
Non-Hispanic Black Population	17,180
Non-Hispanic Asian Population	28,094

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**Source:** 2006 American Community Survey, authors' tabulations.

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**Table 20**

**Inputs: Socioeconomic Status  
Poverty in the U.S., By Race/Ethnicity, 2005**

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	% of Individuals living In Poor Families	% of Children living in Poor Families
United States Average	11%	16%
Non-Hispanic White Population	8	9
Hispanic/Latino Population	21	28
Non-Hispanic Black Population	22	31

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Source: 2006 American Community Survey.

**Table 21**

**Inputs: Language**

All Children aged 5-17 in the Population

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	<b>Percentage of Children 5-17 Who Spoke English with Difficulty</b>
Non-Hispanic White	1.3%
Non-Hispanic Black	1.3
Non-Hispanic Asian	17.4
Hispanic/Latino	19.5
Mexican	22.1
Puerto Rican	10.2
Cuban	13.4
Dominican	22.7

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**Source:** The Condition of Education, 2003.

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**Table 22**

**Inputs: Pre-Schooling**

All Children aged 3-5 in the Population

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**Percentage of Pre-Primary Children  
Aged 3-5 Enrolled in Center-Based  
Early Childhood Programs, 2001**

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Non-Hispanic White	59%
Non-Hispanic Black	66
Hispanic/Latino	43

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**Source:** The Condition of Education, 2003.

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**Table 23**

**Inputs: Urban Versus Suburban School Districts**

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% of Public Elementary and Secondary School Students  
Enrolled in Large or Midsize Cities, 2005

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Overall United States	29%
Non-Hispanic White Population	17
Hispanic/Latino Population	47
Non-Hispanic Black Population	51
Non-Hispanic Asian Population	40

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**Source:** The Condition of Education, 2007

**Table 24**

**Inputs: Parental Involvement:  
Have You Ever Attended a PTA Meeting?**

**Parents with children in K-12 grades**

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Percentage who answered yes

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Non-Hispanic White	59%
Hispanic/Latino	74
Non-Hispanic Black	71

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Source: National Survey of Latinos - Education, Pew Hispanic Center, 2004.

**Table 25**

**Inputs: Parental Expectations  
How important is it for you that your child gets a college education?**

**Parents with children in K-12 grades**

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Percentage who answered “Very Important”

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Non-Hispanic White	78%
Hispanic/Latino	95
Non-Hispanic Black	94

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Source: National Survey of Latinos - Education, Pew Hispanic Center, 2004.

**Table 26**

**Inputs: School Segregation**

**Percentage of Students in Minority Schools, 2005**

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Percentage of Students Enrolled in 50-100% Minority Schools

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Non-Hispanic White	10.8%
Hispanic/Latino	76.3
Non-Hispanic Black	71.6
Non-Hispanic Asian	54.6

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Source: Gary Orfield et. al., The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2006.