

Part 2

Histories, Issues of Immigration, and Schooling Experiences

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01 **5**
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 03 *The Mobility/Social Capital Dynamic:*
 04 **Understanding Mexican American**
 05 **Families and Students**
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09 Robert K. Ream and Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar
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18 From big city mayors and star baseball players to service sector employees and
 19 migrant workers, today's 41 million U.S. Latinos will greatly affect our nation in
 20 the decades before us. The number of U.S. Latinos is increasing eight times more
 21 rapidly than the population as a whole; by 2025 a quarter of all U.S. K-12 students
 22 will be of Spanish-speaking origin (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of
 23 the Census, 2000a). In fact, Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority
 24 population in the United States (Tienda, 2001). The rising numbers of Latinos
 25 brings with it a growing concern regarding their status as students in schools:
 26 Latino student underachievement and dropout rates are disproportionately high
 27 (Latinos in Education, 1998). In 2001, 1.4 million Latinos between the ages of
 28 16 and 24 were dropouts (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2002). The
 29 Latino high school dropout rate is twice that of Blacks and more than three times
 30 that of non-Latino Whites (see Figure 5.1).¹ These numbers prefigure similar
 31 trends in educational attainment at the college level, where Latinos are about
 32 half as likely as their non-Latino White peers to complete 4 years of college
 33 (Vernez & Mizell, 2002).

34 Additionally, considerable differences exist in the educational experiences and
 35 outcomes *among* U.S. Latinos (Aguirre & Martinez, 2000). In particular, youth
 36 of Mexican descent, who are among the most challenged of all U.S. Latino
 37 subgroups (Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004), score significantly lower on
 38

39 ¹ It should be noted, however, that Latinos are also making real educational gains over
 40 generations—improvements that are obscured by the continuing influx of new immigrants.
 41 A recent longitudinal study employing U.S. Census and Current Population Survey data
 42 demonstrates impressive Latino advances in educational *attainment* across generations.
 43 Illustratively, Mexican immigrants born during 1905–1909 averaged but 4.3 years of
 44 schooling. Their American-born sons, averaging 9.3 years, doubled the years of schooling.
 45 And their grandsons were high school graduates, averaging 12.2 years of schooling
 (Smith, 2003).

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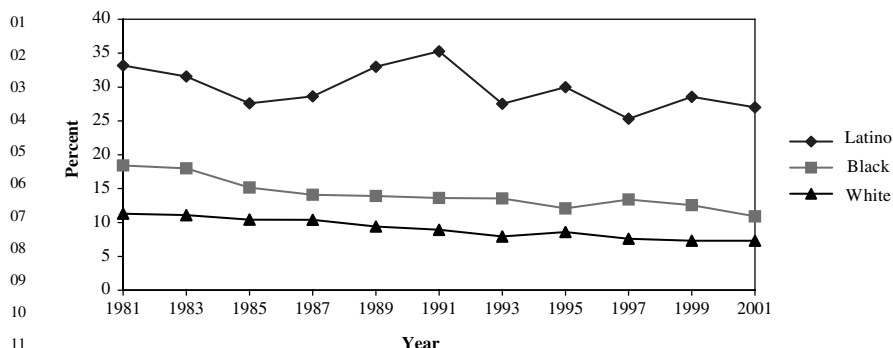


FIGURE 5.1. Status Dropout Rates of 16- to 24-Year-Olds by Race/Ethnicity, 1981–2001.
 Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1972–2001.

Stanford achievement tests and are dropping out of school at higher rates than their same-age peers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). What's more, the two-thirds of all U.S. Latinos who are of Mexican origin have the lowest college completion rate among Latino sub-groups (Vernez & Mizell, 2002). Hence, the U.S. is presented with a growing problem: Mexican American educational achievement and attainment is significantly below the rest of the nation (College Board, 1999). This is cause for serious concern and it is important for policymakers to think about what should and can be done about these perplexing trends.

5.1. Understanding Mexican American Student Performance

Contemporary research offers various reasons for Mexican American underachievement, and yawning economic inequality bears the mark of exceptional culpability in this regard. Still, some of the explanatory pieces continue to be missing from the puzzle. To illustrate, dozens if not hundreds of studies point to poverty as an insidious and fundamental reason why economically disadvantaged children do not perform to their true potential (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Rothstein, 2004). Yet such studies, based on material and human capital (i.e., economic wealth and skills developed through schooling), have yet to explain why some middle-class minority students consistently perform below non-Latino Whites with similar economic and family backgrounds (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 1995). And while primary cultural differences (i.e., language and parenting styles) are most frequently cited in association with Mexican American underachievement (Gándara, 1994), relevant research remains the subject of considerable debate (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997). Still, at least 30 years of research on Latino underachievement has focused

01 attention on cultural disjuncture, noting that youth of Mexican descent often
02 attend schools where teachers have little knowledge of their cultural backgrounds
03 (Gibson et al., 2004), which has led to widespread student alienation and disen-
04 gagement from school (Trueba, 1988). Yet first-generation immigrant students
05 exhibit often quite optimistic perceptions of their schooling experiences and
06 educational future (Buriel, 1984; Suarez-Orozco, 1991). Indeed, researchers are
07 beginning to question “cultural difference” perspectives most associated with
08 John Ogbu (1992) by showing that many minority students—regardless of the
09 terms of their incorporation or length of residence in the U.S.—maintain sanguine
10 perceptions about their schooling (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). In
11 short, low average levels of educational achievement and attainment among
12 U.S. Latinos, and Mexican origin youth in particular, remains a persistent and
13 complex problem that demands more exacting theoretical explanations.

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16 5.2. Functional and Critical Interpretations of Social 17 Capital

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19 Given these limitations, social scientists continue to investigate alternative
20 perspectives that can inform our understanding of Mexican American educa-
21 tional performance (Valencia, 2002). One alternative view, based on theories
22 of social capital,² calls for researchers and educators to more carefully consider
23 the resources and forms of support found in young people’s social networks
24 (e.g., expert knowledge about the complexities of college admission). What this
25 perspective offers is not only a focus on network resources critical to school
26 success, but also a focus on those complex institutional processes that can either
27 facilitate or inhibit the trust necessary for *help giving* and *help seeking*—two
28 forms of agency associated with social capital.

29

30 Over the years, researchers have shown how the ideological emphasis on rapid
31 cultural assimilation tends to undermine the utility of social capital among Latino
32 youth (Valenzuela, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). One specific example is how
33 the devaluation of bicultural identities and of bilingualism, in conjunction with
34 stigma often attached to membership in high school ESL (English as a Second
35 Language) programs, undermines not only the potential for feelings of social
36 integration and “we-ness” between ESL students and their more acculturated
37 peers, but also the possibilities for the latter group to aid the former with resources
38 and forms of support that could facilitate their integration into the school, their

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40 ² Reflected in the ability of individuals to command limited resources by virtue of their
41 relationships or membership in broader social structures (Portes, 1998), social capital
42 is made up of resources that may be converted into material capital (Bourdieu, 1986),
43 human capital (Coleman, 1988) and healthy civic participation and community cohesion
44 (Putnam, 2000). Moreover, the fungibility of social capital bridges the economic and
45 sociological perspectives, thus capturing the attention of policymakers who are seeking
creative solutions to social problems.

01 accommodation of English, and their academic achievement (Conchas, 2001;
02 Flores-González, 2002).

03 Researchers such as Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) have underscored
04 the rather axiomatic notion that social networks have the potential to improve
05 quality of life for individuals and the broader community. Bourdieu (1986) and
06 more recent work by Stanton-Salazar (2001), in contrast, emphasize how social
07 capital processes are embedded in racial, class, and gender inequalities in society.
08 Building upon Bourdieu's work that social capital is a form of wealth that arises
09 out of economic and political stratification, Stanton-Salazar, (2001) argues that
10 social capital among working-class youth (i.e., access, *via* social exchange, to
11 middle-class educational resources) is never the norm. When it does occur,
12 however, it usually requires extraordinary interventions within the household, the
13 school, and the community. For disadvantaged youth, the existence of structural
14 conditions that simultaneously operate to undermine resources and support is the
15 norm, and falls within the purview of research on social capital and educational
16 outcomes (see Dika and Singh, 2002).

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19 5.3. The Mobility/Social Capital Dynamic

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21 In this chapter we focus our attention on one such condition. Specifically, we
22 argue that for a significant segment of the Mexican origin student population,
23 *academic achievement is adversely impacted by the instability in social relation-*
24 *ships that accompanies particularly high rates of student transience and*
25 *residential mobility of their families.* Like the frequent re-potting of plants,
26 such mobility disrupts social root systems and the social context for interaction
27 (Putnam, 2000). It follows that the *mobility/social capital dynamic* whereby
28 mobility impacts the resources inherent in students' social networks merits
29 attention on the basis of its influence over relationship stability and academic
30 achievement (Ream, 2005b). We elaborate here on this important problem.

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33 5.3.1. *The Incidence of Mobility*

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35 High rates of residential and student mobility (non-promotional school changes
36 that may or may not be associated with a change of residence) tend to harm
37 students who change schools and usually present themselves as administrative
38 and pedagogical challenges for teachers and school administrators (Rumberger
39 et al., 1999; Ream, 2005a). Were mobility not so commonplace, it might
40 not warrant the attention of educators and policymakers. A growing body of
41 research shows, however, that student mobility is widespread in many schools
42 and districts throughout the United States. In fact, *most* children make at least
43 one school change without being promoted to the next grade level, and many
44 change schools even more frequently (Rumberger, 2003). Mobility is particu-
45 larly pronounced within large, predominantly minority, urban school districts
with high concentrations of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

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01 (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). One in every five urban and suburban high schools
02 in California has a mobility rate in excess of 30 percent (Rumberger et al.,
03 1999). Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, reported a high school
04 “transience rate” (measured as the proportion of students who entered after school
05 started or left before school ended) exceeding 35 percent across the district for
06 the 2001–2002 school year (LAUSD, 2004).

07 *Mobility Among U.S. Latinos.* Latinos change residence more often than any
08 other racial/ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau News, January, 2000).
09 Between 2002 and 2003 Latinos were found to have moved at considerably
10 higher rates (18 percent) than non-Latino Whites (12.4 percent) (U.S. Census
11 Bureau, 2004). Moreover, data from the 1998 National Assessment of Educa-
12 tional Progress (NAEP) show that 41 percent of Latino 4th grade students
13 changed schools in the previous 2 years, compared with 33 percent of Asian
14 American students and 27 percent of non-Latino Whites in the same grade cohort
15 (Rumberger, 2003). The Mexican American majority of U.S. Latinos are also
16 highly mobile, particularly at the secondary school level. Excluding dropouts,
17 37 percent of Mexican American adolescents moved residences at least once
18 between 1988 and 1992 compared to 31 percent of their White counterparts. In
19 terms of student mobility, 30 percent of Mexican Americans made at least one
20 non-promotional school change between 8th and 12th grade, compared to approx-
21 imately 20 percent of Whites. What’s more, the mobility rate for highly mobile
22 students (those with two or more non-promotional school changes between 8th
23 and 12th grade) is nearly twice as high for Mexican Americans as it is for
24 Whites.³

25 The incidence of mobility is also associated with socioeconomic status (SES)
26 and nativity status (i.e., immigrants vs. U.S.-born) among Mexican origin youth.
27 For those whose family SES is below the national average, rates of student
28 mobility are considerably *higher* than they are for their Mexican-origin peers
29 whose SES is above the national mean (32 percent compared to 22 percent,
30 respectively). For White adolescents, the incidence of student mobility remains
31 consistent across lower and upper SES groups, at approximately 22 percent.
32 Thus, we can deduce a negative association between SES and student mobility
33 among youth of Mexican descent; whereas SES and student mobility do not
34 reveal associational patterns among Whites. We also consider the data according
35 to nativity status. Mexican immigrants are particularly mobile—with 32 percent
36 changing schools between grades 8 and 12, compared to only 14 percent of
37 non-Latino White immigrants. In comparison, 29 percent of second generation
38 and 24 percent of third+ generation Mexican origin youth changed schools.

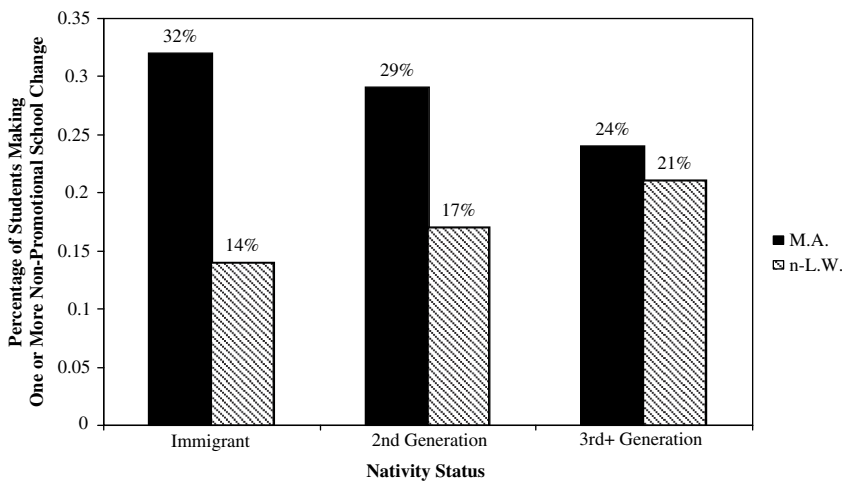
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41 ³ We use weighted panel data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988
42 (NELS:88) to illustrate mobility rates (excluding dropouts) among Mexican origin youth.
43 NELS:88 is a nationally representative longitudinal panel study of a cohort of approx-
44 imately 25,000 8th graders who were re-surveyed in 10th grade (1990), in 12th grade
45 (1992), and then again in 1994 and 2000. For further information on NELS:88, see
<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88>.

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01 The trend moves in the opposite direction among Whites who become slightly
 02 *more* mobile with acculturation. Yet even the most stable generation of Mexican
 03 Americans changes schools at higher rates than the most mobile generation of
 04 Whites, per Figure 5.2.

05 *Historical Perspective and Demographics.* It may be illuminating to situate our
 06 treatment of the *mobility/social capital dynamic* in a historical context. During
 07 the 1960s, more acculturated second and third+ generation Chicanos constituted
 08 the majority in many Mexican communities throughout the southwestern United
 09 States. In 1960, only 20 percent of California's Latino population was foreign-
 10 born; three quarters of all working-age Latinos were U.S. natives, and two-thirds
 11 of Latino children were third generation (López & Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The
 12 manufacturing sector of our national economy had yet to begin its flight to the
 13 "third world," and union membership was still strong. Occupational stability
 14 (and unrepentant racial segregation) made student mobility a rather mute issue,
 15 except for the children of migrant agricultural laborers. Much has changed in the
 16 last 30 years to alter the demographic landscape of urban America in particular;
 17 we attempt here only a succinct delineation of the most salient trends.

18 Although Latino immigration nationwide has been on the rise in the past two
 19 decades, the current percentage of immigrants from Spanish speaking nations
 20 like Mexico is only slightly higher than historical levels (Moore, 2001). What has
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 22



38 FIGURE 5.2. Student Mobility by Nativity Status, Grades 8–12.

39 *Note:* M.A. = Mexican Americans; n-L.W. = non-Latino Whites. Student mobility
 40 from grades 8–12 based on data from 12th grade student questionnaire. Student mobility
 41 excludes school changes due to promotion from elementary to middle school and from
 42 middle school to high school.

43 *Source:* National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, panel of 1988 eighth-
 44 grade students resurveyed in 1990 and 1992, excluding dropouts. Statistics weighted
 45 ($f2pnlwt/mean\ f2pnlwt$).

01 made Mexican immigrants considerably more visible has been the consistency of
 02 their immigration combined with their cumulative representation, both of which
 03 have paralleled the concomitant decline in the percentage of non-Latino White
 04 children, especially in places like California and Texas. Particularly salient has
 05 been the demise of the manufacturing sector, the concurrent rise of a low-wage
 06 service sector, and the increasing representation of Latino undocumented workers
 07 who come to fill many of these jobs. Finally, adult immigrants in the low-wage
 08 service sector are concentrated in central cities and in the older suburbs of
 09 metro America; better-off third+ generation Latinos have scattered throughout
 10 the new suburban American landscape, along with everyone else (Jensen, 2001).
 11 Comparably high rates of transience among impoverished Mexican immigrant
 12 families must be seen in this economic and historical context. While previous
 13 generations (e.g., 1960s) were able to root themselves in cities that still sustained
 14 stable manufacturing industries, today's Latino immigrants must contend with
 15 a highly exploitative labor sector that forces families to chase better-paying
 16 jobs and find affordable housing, moving from neighborhoods that are highly
 17 *transitory* and *anomic* to other locales plagued by similar challenging conditions
 18 (see Stanton-Salazar, 2001, pp. 52–54).

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21 5.4. The Impact of Mobility on Students and Schools

22

23 Reminiscent of French sociologist Emile Durkheim's seminal research on
 24 mobility and large-scale *anomie*,⁴ mounting research shows that mobility is detri-
 25 mental to students' psychological, academic, and social well-being. Coping with
 26 a new school environment in the wake of a school change can be psychologically
 27 challenging. The following comments from a high school student, published in
 28 a comprehensive study of student mobility in California, places that challenge
 29 in high relief:

30

31 Moving and changing schools really shattered my personality. I feel like there's all
 32 these little things I picked up from all the different schools and I feel all disoriented all
 33 the time. There's no grounding. I always just feel like I'm floating. It's psychological
 34 damage, really...Because you never feel like a complete person. That's how I feel—I
 35 feel fragmented. Every time I moved I felt less and less important. (Rumberger et al.,
 1999, p. 37)

36

37 Numerous studies also document the negative impact of mobility on student
 38 performance in the primary grades (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994;
 39 Heinlein & Shinn, 2000). Of the achievement-related research at the secondary
 40 school level, one study of 643 ninth graders found that mobility negatively

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42 _____
 43 ⁴ Durkheim coined the term *anomie* to describe a state of isolation that typically exists
 44 in times of upheaval and social change. Anomie is associated with the loss of a particular
 45 way of life—a state of “normlessness” that emerges when rules, habits, and beliefs no
 longer hold and alternatives have yet to arise.

01 impacts student performance in mathematics (Benson & Weigel, 1981). But
02 mobility-related studies that take into account background characteristics, such
03 as family structure and socioeconomic status, offer mixed results, at least at the
04 secondary school level (Rumberger, 2003). One such study found that changing
05 both schools and residences during high school reduced 12th grade test scores
06 in reading and mathematics, but that changing schools alone had no significant
07 impact (Pribesh & Downey, 1999). Another found that despite some negative
08 short-term consequences, the incidence of student mobility early in high school
09 does not deter modest gains in mathematics achievement for students who
10 thereafter remain in school through the twelfth grade (Swanson & Schneider,
11 1999). Thus, the impact of student mobility may have something to do with its
12 timing, and timing might be associated with the *reasons* students change schools
13 (Ream 2005a).

14 The strongest and most consistent impact of mobility is on students' prospects
15 for graduation from high school (Rumberger, 2003). There is clear evidence
16 that mobility during high school diminishes the likelihood of completing
17 school on time (Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991). One longitudinal study
18 that examined the relationship between residential mobility and high school
19 completion found that, even after controlling for a variety of family background
20 variables, residential mobility reduced the odds of graduation (Haveman &
21 Wolfe, 1994). Another study shows that students who made just one non-
22 promotional school change between the 8th and 12th grades were less than half
23 as likely to graduate from high school compared to students who did not make
24 a non-promotional school change (Rumberger et al., 1999).

25 There are several reasons as to why student mobility may negatively impact
26 educational attainment. Adapting to a new school environment can be a
27 challenging proposition for anyone. This is particularly so for adolescent youth
28 who are in the midst of a difficult developmental life stage characterized by
29 increased peer orientation, invidious social comparison, dissonant identities, and
30 gradual autonomy from family control (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). New class-
31 mates and teachers as well as changing academic standards and behavioral
32 expectations must be adjusted to in an often compressed time-frame (Jason et al.,
33 1992). The lack of an adequate administrative system responsive to transient
34 families plays a prominent role. Such a system would entail a sort of safety net
35 or support system designed to socially integrate new students in an efficient,
36 intensive, and compassionate manner. In the absence of such a system, we often
37 find a syndrome of misplaced transcripts, misdirected classroom placements,
38 and curricular incoherence between sending and receiving schools that typically
39 exacerbate already difficult transitions for mobile students. Mid-year school
40 changes in particular are nearly synonymous with awkward transitions during
41 which students may be mistakenly transplanted into classes they have already
42 taken, or re-situated in classrooms where they are ill prepared to succeed.

43 Mobile students are not the only ones who suffer the consequences of
44 student mobility: students with stable attendance records may also be academ-
45 ically impaired if they attend schools with highly mobile student populations

01 (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001). To illustrate, students who attended high
02 schools with overall mobility rates of 40 percent scored significantly lower
03 on 10th grade standardized mathematics tests than students who attended high
04 schools with mobility rates of 10 percent (Rumberger et al., 1999). Furthermore,
05 mobility can have a negative effect on classrooms and schools. It is not only
06 administrative costs—and added expenses due to students who, upon their
07 departure, fail to return textbooks—that tax schools when dealing with transient
08 student populations. Developing and sustaining a cohesive student body and a
09 school-wide *esprit de corps* in a chaotic and ever-changing school environment
10 can also present a Herculean challenge that under-resourced schools may be
11 ill-prepared to overcome.

12 *Disconnect Between Mobile Students and School Personnel.* Informal family
13 bonds can act to moderate or lessen the negative impact of mobility on transient
14 youth (Hagan, Macmillan, & Wheaton, 1996). Latinos are known to rely heavily
15 on their parents and other family members for emotional and psychological
16 support (Vélez-Ibañez, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Immigrant parents' invest-
17 ments in their children's well being can be limited, however, by the demands
18 and stressors parents confront as immigrants in the low-wage labor force (Trejo,
19 1996), and by the language barriers that distance parents from the schools
20 their children attend (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Thus,
21 relative to many other student groups, scholastic success among many Latino
22 youth from immigrant households is much more dependent upon resource-
23 full relationships with *nonfamilial* adults *outside the home*. More specifically,
24 school personnel, who possess valuable information about educational programs,
25 academic tutoring, college admission and the like, have been identified as critical
26 institutional agents who can be particularly helpful to second-generation Latino
27 students living in working-class homes embedded in stressful ecological condi-
28 tions (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Ream, 2005a).

29 At the same time, however, Latino and other minority students routinely
30 confront institutional conditions and social forces that are quite difficult. Many
31 of these forces have been elaborated in our previous work (Stanton-Salazar,
32 1997, 2001; Ream, 2003, 2005a). Most important, we believe, is that the devel-
33 opment of supportive ties with school personnel is difficult due to cultural and
34 language differences, racialized identities, and social class distinctions, which
35 create infertile ground for developing trust, positive affect, and mutual emotional
36 investment. Such conditions, particularly when combined with the added problem
37 of mobility, can (a) inhibit help-seeking behaviors among Mexican origin youth,
38 and (b) dissuade school personnel from conscientiously investing in the academic
39 success of minorities. What we find, then, is a paradox where students, although
40 embedded in an environment replete with human and institutional resources,
41 and socially engaged within a network of school administrators, teachers and
42 counselors, are nevertheless unable to position themselves within a genuine
43 system of social support.

44 Here we focus our attention on the vexing problem of student mobility
45 and less on the consequences of racialized interactions between students and

01 school personnel. An excerpt from Ream's (2005a) study, clarifies just how
02 mobility diminishes the necessary ingredients for the formation of social capital.
03 One teacher declared with confidence that "The connection to success is the
04 connection children feel to the teacher." She followed this insight, however,
05 with the following lament: "It takes awhile for teachers and students to feel
06 comfortable with one another, to take risks and all those wonderful mysterious
07 factors of learning—student mobility keeps interrupting that process" (Ream,
08 2005a, p. 142). Indeed, her view reflects the perspectives of many other educators
09 serving highly transient student populations (Rumberger et al., 1999).

10 Social scientists have long understood that the norm of "reciprocity" is one
11 fundamental ingredient in the development of social capital (i.e., access to
12 resources via cooperative, mutually beneficial relationships). Neither mobile
13 students nor school personnel are particularly motivated to invest in relation-
14 ships lacking time-earned trust. Teachers know that newly arriving students,
15 especially mid-year school changers, are often here today and gone tomorrow.
16 Under such conditions, teachers may be less inclined to invest in mobile students
17 when they seem unlikely to fulfill the implicit reciprocal contract (Wehlage
18 et al., 1989). And with repeated experiences of mobility, transient students often
19 become resigned to developing a coping strategy of self-reliance and lowered
20 expectations of support from school-based agents.

21 The phenomenon of mass teacher "burn-out" can arise from the repetitive loss
22 of students they emotionally invest in and can result in disinclination to work
23 with transient students. The comments of one frustrated second-year English
24 instructor in a high school with particularly high rates of mobility illustrates
25 the point:

26 Teachers put effort into teaching and the kids leave. So we don't have that sense of
27 continuity and accomplishment with the transient students—and that affects morale.
28 (Ream, 2005a, p. 142)

29
30 The notion that student learning most effectively occurs in the context of stable
31 and caring pedagogical relationships is well-documented in the education field.
32 Paradoxically, it has also been long recognized that even when schools serving
33 minority student populations do put in place empowering pedagogical practices
34 and curriculum, social forces outside the school, particularly those rooted in the
35 local and regional economies, often undermine the best of educational reforms
36 (Feagin, 1980).

37

38

39 5.5. The Causes of Student Mobility

40

41 Residential mobility is often associated with a school change—particularly
42 among elementary school children. One national study found that students who
43 moved were five times more likely to change schools than students who did
44 not move (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Changing residences, however, does
45 not always result in changing schools. Some states, such as California, have

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01 policies allowing students whose family has moved into a different school
02 district to remain in their initial school placement. Just as students may move
03 without changing schools, some students change schools without moving. About
04 one-third of all school changes among Mexican American adolescents are *not*
05 associated with a change of residence (27% among Whites). These numbers
06 distinguish residential from student mobility, and suggest that Mexican American
07 students are *less* likely to make a residential change without changing schools
08 and are *more* likely to change schools without changing residences than their
09 non-Latino White peers (Ream, 2005a).

10 At the secondary school level, parents, students, and school personnel all
11 make decisions contributing to high rates of student mobility. Under the
12 best of circumstances, mobility is the product of aspiration, opportunity, and
13 rational action. The reality, however, is that adolescents often change schools
14 suddenly and *reactively*—when an unpredictable job market causes working-
15 class parents to scramble after insecure employment opportunities, or when
16 parents split up and a custodial parent leaves town. Under optimal conditions
17 there is genuine strategy underlying a planned school change, with parents and
18 students acting as rational actors and informed consumers in the educational
19 “marketplace.” Frequently, however, students change schools for reasons that
20 are neither entirely beyond their control, nor exclusively the result of strategic
21 forethought.

22 *Family-Initiated Mobility.* Family-initiated mobility among Mexican
23 Americans is often *reactive* in nature. One student, Ivan, recalled being
24 whipsawed from school-to-school as a result of his father’s demanding work-
25 related responsibilities. “I do maintenance and I used to work for Z-Property
26 Management,” his immigrant father explained, “and so the company forced
27 me to move to different cities.” (Ream, 2005a, p. 77). Each time the family
28 moved residences, Iván was forced to change schools, often in the middle
29 of the school year. In Iván’s case, however, school changes were at times
30 *reactive* and on one occasion, somewhat more *strategic*. His parents initiated a
31 slew of reactive school changes in response to his father’s demanding mainte-
32 nance job, but on one occasion the family changed residences for the explicit
33 purpose of helping their son escape an especially poor school and enroll in
34 a markedly better one. “When we moved to San Roque, Iván suffered a lot
35 because that technical school there is one of the worst high schools. That’s why
36 I quit my last job. We moved right away, this time because of the schools.”
37 (Ream, 2005a, p. 79)

38 *Student-Initiated Mobility.* Given the increased autonomy that coincides with
39 adolescent development, it is not surprising that high school students sometimes
40 make independent decisions to change schools. In fact, a large percentage
41 of student mobility at the secondary level—nearly 50 percent in the state
42 of California—is the result of student-initiated requests to change schools
43 (Rumberger et al., 1999). Among transient Latinos who make their own decision
44 to change high schools, reactive mobility may be the norm (Ream, 2005a). Unful-
45 filled reciprocity expectations, a breakdown in trust, or cultural and normative

01 differences between minority students and mainstream school personnel can
02 contribute to sudden and often mid-year school changes. Intimidation or overt
03 racism also may cause some kids to change schools, but still others are motivated
04 by loneliness, finding themselves bereft of a committed peer group, or feeling
05 trapped in an uncaring school environment that can cause despairing adolescents
06 to look elsewhere for a sense of belonging. Although the causes of student
07 alienation and subsequent transience are not always so obviously measurable,
08 school ethnographies have identified a superficial notion of caring deployed by at
09 least some school personnel that stands in stark contrast to students' ideas about
10 what a more authentic notion of caring should be (Courtney & Nobilit, 1994).
11 Angela Valenzuela's (1999) research among adolescent Mexican Americans is
12 informative:

13 When Mexican American youth reject schooling, they do so because their teachers do not
14 fully apprehend their ethnic, social-class and peer-group realities, including their culture
15 of caring. (Valenzuela, 1999, pp. 324–325)

16 Valenzuela suggests that different conceptions of caring can lead to a breach
17 of trust between mainstream school personnel and non-mainstream students.
18 Other studies demonstrate similar patterns of distrust and social distance between
19 mainstream school personnel and minority youth (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991),
20 which may result in part from a lack of overlap in sub-cultural values and
21 norms (Gibson et al., 2004). As a consequence, many students do not believe
22 teachers are highly interested in their well-being, and this perception promotes
23 their disengagement from school.

24 *School-Initiated Mobility.* Besides family- and student-initiated types of
25 mobility, there is the growing phenomenon of mobility as precipitated by the
26 schools themselves (Gotbaum, 2002), known as an *Opportunity Transfer* or
27 “OT.” Although OTs are sometimes employed to address problems such as
28 misbehavior or fighting in school, students are often transferred out for less
29 egregious reasons, such as poor attendance or flagging grades. The latter comes
30 in the context of policy changes that simultaneously demand greater school-
31 level accountability and higher graduation standards for students. Some teachers
32 contend that the children of working class Latinos are particularly vulnerable to
33 being transferred, involuntarily, to another school:

34 My experience as a teacher—and I have a lot of it—is that schools transfer Hispanic
35 kids because the parents will not protest. . .Hispanic parents are more fearful and more
36 respectful. The middle class White parents would say, ‘You’re not transferring *my* kid!’
37 (Ream, 2005a, p. 85)

38 Case studies of urban high schools document that school officials do actively try
39 to get rid of “troublemakers” by forcing them to leave or telling them they must
40 leave (Fine, 1991). As emergent federal and state accountability schemes are
41 putting increasing pressure on schools to demonstrate test-score improvement,
42 the OT option seems likely to become an even more attractive tool both for
43 removing troublemakers and for shuffling under-performing students elsewhere,
44 so as not to tarnish schools' educational performance statistics.
45

01 Finally, the increasingly intense focus on accountability for test scores and
02 graduation rates at the school level may inadvertently encourage administrators
03 and other institutional agents to cast a blind eye to the needs of highly mobile
04 student populations. If schools cannot, and are not encouraged to exemplify
05 the sort of institutional staying power that helps keep students from changing
06 schools, we may continue, instead, to exacerbate the “card-shuffling” process
07 to the detriment of those students in our schools who face the most explicit
08 educational challenges.

09
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11 5.6. Discussion of Policy Implications

12

13 In a landmark study of Congressional agenda-setting, John Kingdon (1995)
14 suggests that three factors must converge in order for an issue, such as the
15 underachievement of Mexican origin youth, to be placed front-and-center on
16 the policy agenda. First, the issue—in this case, low average levels of Mexican
17 American educational achievement and attainment—must be broadly recognized
18 as a problem with clear social implications. Second, the political winds must
19 blow in a direction giving elected officials practical reasons to believe the issue
20 may be relevant to concerns about their own career viability before the issue will
21 get incorporated as an important item in her/his political platform. Third, there
22 must be policy solutions available to address the problem. When considering the
23 contributions of teachers and school personnel, we agree with the importance of
24 focusing on alterable variables as emphasized by Waxman, Padron, & Garcia
25 (Ch. 8, this volume). We also echo Thompson’s strategy (Ch. 9, this volume)
26 of distinguishing between “alterable variables,” or what educators *can* change
27 (e.g., reading instruction, administrative practices) and those structural conditions
28 outside the immediate control of educators and the school (e.g., concentrated
29 neighborhood poverty). In the following section of this chapter, then, we consider
30 a number of *alterable variables* that educators and policymakers can consider
31 as they address the *mobility/social capital dynamic*, specifically in terms of its
32 adverse effects on frequently mobile Latino students from low-income immigrant
33 families.

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36 5.7. Accountability Mechanisms

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38 Although some instances of student mobility are the result of strategic relocation
39 (i.e., a carefully-considered move to a better school), many other instances are
40 reactive in nature. Case studies have shown, however, that schools undertaking
41 substantial and meaningful reforms can reduce unnecessary student transience.
42 In a three-year period from 1987 to 1990, Hollibrook Accelerated School,
43 in Houston, Texas, reduced its student mobility rate from 104 to 47 percent
44 (McCarthy & Still, 1993, p. 80). Programs that target high-risk students have also
45 been shown to reduce student mobility dramatically. For instance, a successful

01 dropout prevention program in Southern California reduced student turnover by
02 one half among the most at-risk Latino students in a Los Angeles area middle
03 school (Larson & Rumberger, 1995).

04 In today's accountability-oriented environment, however, there may actually
05 exist inherent disincentives for schools to work toward the retention of transient
06 youth and families. By enrolling higher performing students while encouraging
07 academically challenged students to head elsewhere, schools can boost overall
08 test score performance and reduce dropout rates. Working-class immigrant
09 Latinos may be particularly vulnerable to the "card shuffling" that results
10 when school administrators push underperforming students out their doors,
11 often by employing practices under such euphemistic names as *Opportunity*
12 *Transfers*, or *OTs*. Certainly, this is a disturbing shortcut to "success"—and
13 one that has been thoroughly reported in a recent series of articles in *The New*
14 *York Times* (Medina & Lewin, 2003; Lewin, 2004). Education policymakers
15 must grapple honestly and schools must wrestle self-critically with account-
16 ability incentives that implicitly encourage the removal of under-performing
17 students.

- 18
- 19 • *Hold School Districts Accountable*. Beyond examining aggregate test scores
20 of individual schools in isolation (a method that might reward schools
21 for using *OTs* to distribute at least some of their charges elsewhere), we
22 should also measure accountability more broadly, at the school district
23 level. Indeed, student mobility is best understood as an intra-district
24 phenomenon that occurs within a localized geographic area.⁵ If *Adequate*
25 *Yearly Progress* (AYP) was redefined in such a way that it could function
26 as a district *and* a school performance standard, such a policy might
27 encourage (a) effective district-level strategies to counter reactive student
28 mobility, and (b) a greater degree of between-school coordination and
29 collaboration to assist mobile students with the school-to-school transition
30 process. Thus, high rates of non-promotional student transience could be
31 seen for what they really are, and schools could rightly see themselves
32 as part of the solution to the wider problems within a district. In short,
33 accountability mechanisms should be adjusted to draw district- and school-
34 level distinctions regarding student mobility in order to develop a more
35 thoughtful incentive structure behind systemic educational reforms (Offenberg,
36 2004).
- 37 • *Report cohort mobility rates*. What specific forms of accountability might be
38 established so as to encourage districts and secondary schools in particular
39 to undertake efforts to reduce reactive student mobility? Extra funding to
40 document cohort graduation rates (the proportion of students who graduate
41 from a specific entering class or cohort of students) would also reveal

42

43 ⁵ Rumberger & Larson (1998) found that 80 percent of non-promotional school
44 changes for a cohort of urban Los Angeles area Latino students were within the same
45 district.

01 the number of students from each cohort who left before completion—the
 02 cohort mobility rate (Rumberger et al., 1999). Measuring mobility rates in
 03 this way would at least provide a partial reflection of a schools’ “holding
 04 power”—by which we mean schools’ capacity to engage students in the
 05 educational process so as to assure more stable student populations. Schools
 06 could be evaluated over set periods to measure increase or decrease in
 07 overall rates of student transience in comparison to base year figures.
 08 Those schools that succeed in reducing the incidence of *reactive* mobility
 09 across time could be rewarded for promoting a more stable educational
 10 environment precisely because it is likely to have direct bearing on the
 11 standards of educational achievement for *all* students who participate in the
 12 system.

13
 14

15 5.8. Schools at the Center of Social Capital Development

16

17 We assert here that secondary schools can be better designed to act as the
 18 fulcrum for social capital development among working-class minority youth
 19 across family, peer, school, and community domains. Current educational experi-
 20 ments and model intervention programs—particularly those that tap into the value
 21 of healthy and reciprocal social relationships—are improving the lives of students
 22 from low-income households and communities (Maeroff, 1998; Stanton-Salazar,
 23 Vásquez, & Mehan, 2000). We propose that such programs offer helpful guide-
 24 lines as to how we can re-design schools serving frequently transient immigrant
 25 populations. In the remaining pages we call attention to innovative programs
 26 that deserve attention by researchers, school reformers, and policy-makers. A
 27 close examination of these programs—each of which draws upon the power of
 28 relationships and the resources that inhere within social networks—reveals four
 29 essential components that are given brief consideration below.

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(1) *The School Component*

- *Newcomer Clubs*: Many schools have responded to the regular entrée of new immigrant students by instituting programs designed to smooth the transition process. One southern California high school, for example, implemented a comprehensive plan to reduce mobility and mitigate its negative effects by encouraging new arrivals to join the “Newcomers Club,” which meets weekly with school counselors. Parents of transient youth are also provided extra opportunities to meet with school counselors in order to fortify a home-school connection. A Maryland suburban high school implemented a similar program, initiating a “New Student Support Group” where counselors meet weekly with new students to provide information about the school and to discuss students’ concerns about relocating (Wilson, 1993).

- 01 • *Student-counselor relations*: Shoring up student-counselor relations
 02 appears as an essential part of the most effective interventions.⁶ The
 03 *Puente Project*, another well-studied program, is designed to enhance
 04 the resource exchange potential inherent in students' social networks,
 05 and targets Latino freshmen and sophomores across a wide achievement
 06 spectrum, offering to help them graduate and go on to college (Gándara,
 07 2002). The *counseling component* is largely designed to ensure that *Puente*
 08 students are placed in college preparatory classes and offered the infor-
 09 mation necessary to prepare themselves for college eligibility. Counselors
 10 supervise college visits, initiate meetings between parents and *Puente*
 11 personnel, and even oversee the extramural *Puente Club* through which
 12 students socialize in structured extracurricular environments.
- 13 • *Teachers-counselor networks*: The fortification of collaborative ties
 14 between teachers and counselors is another key component found in many
 15 educational reform efforts. The *ALAS* program—*Achievement for Latinos*
 16 *through Academic Success*— is a dropout prevention program targeting
 17 high-risk middle-school Latino youth who live in impoverished urban
 18 neighborhoods. *ALAS* counselors work with middle school teachers to
 19 initiate more regular feedback to students and parents regarding students'
 20 educational progress and needs. One study evaluating *ALAS* concluded
 21 that the program had a practical impact on students directly affected by its
 22 interventions, reducing student turnover by one half among at-risk Latino
 23 students in a Los Angeles area middle school (Larson & Rumberger,
 24 1995).

25 (2) *The Peer Group Component*
 26

27 Recent scholarship has strongly emphasized the essential role of peers in both
 28 child and adolescent development (Harris, 1998) and school achievement (Gibson
 29 et al., 2004). So it is hardly surprising that peer group support is another key
 30 aspect of many successful programs, including the *Advancement Via Individual*
 31 *Determination (AVID)* program now with many sites across the U.S. *AVID* seems
 32 to us outstanding for its particular sensitivity to the notion that underachieving
 33 ethnic or linguistic minority students from highly transient low-income families
 34 might benefit from the thoughtful re-organization of social life in and beyond
 35 the school. *AVID* taps the resources that inhere in students' social networks by
 36 valuing the role and simultaneous (if not collaborative) social support of all key
 37 parties: parents, the peer group, school personnel, and community agents. By
 38

39 _____
 40 ⁶ Since school counselors are largely responsible for guiding mobile students on both the
 41 departure and arrival ends of the school transfer process, bolstering the bi-lingual and
 42 bi-cultural counseling staffs at schools serving an especially transient immigrant second
 43 generation would undoubtedly help mitigate the potential negative impacts of student
 44 mobility. Yet even the most optimistic estimates of the current national average of one
 45 guidance counselor to 600 students paint a less than rosy picture of what appears quite
 literally to be a lonely profession.

01 helping students become part of a trusting, school-oriented network of peers that
02 share common educational goals, *AVID* reframes achievement as a collective
03 experience rather than as an individual one. This is done by bringing mid-
04 performing adolescents together in collaborative learning environments—study
05 groups, reader-writer workshops, and a special elective class that meets for one
06 academic period a day, 180 days a year, for 3 or 4 years (Mehan et al., 1996;
07 Gándara et al., 1998).

08

09 (3) *Home-School Connections*

10

11 There is by now a substantial literature on the educational value of parents’
12 informal relations with their own children (Steinberg, 2001), as well as their
13 more formal relationships with other parents (Carbonaro, 1998) and with school
14 personnel (Chrispeels & Rivera, 2001). Indeed, fortifying home-school connec-
15 tions is another essential component of the most effective programs, as suggested
16 in those schools that set up “Newcomer Clubs.” *AVID*’s success is also partly
17 contingent upon its empowerment of parents. Parent advisory boards, family
18 study skills gatherings, and college awareness meetings are among the *AVID*
19 activities facilitating parent involvement in schools. Family Night Dinners are
20 another way that *AVID* bridges the family-school divide.

21

22 (4) *Community-Component & Student Mentoring*

23

24 The *Puente Project* and *AVID* also stand by the notion that the broader
25 community must be woven into the fabric of the school experience. A community
26 mentor liaison is responsible for the mentoring component of the *Puente Project*,
27 which is fashioned so as to harness the power of community social capital
28 by identifying, training, and then matching Latino community mentors with
29 9th graders. By this process, the mentoring component facilitates capital-rich
30 and mutually rewarding relationships between students and community mentors
31 (Gándara et al., 1998). *AVID* further expects colleges, universities, and area
32 businesses to share in the task of preparing and motivating underserved students
33 who are willing to work hard to get into college.

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37 5.9. Conclusion and Recommendations

38

39 The lesson we can derive from the various programs noted above is the paradig-
40 matic approach they take in working with students from groups that have histor-
41 ically been most underserved by our school system. Foremost is the operating
42 assumption that these students can indeed succeed in school, in spite of the many
43 economic and ecological hardships they and their families endure. Secondly, such
44 success is predicated upon the very intentional design of a *social support system*
45 around each student—a system that functions across family, peer, school, and

01 community domains as a *countervailing* force in their lives.⁷ Students, thus, are
 02 embedded in inter-connected networks of agents already existing in their social
 03 world, or within close proximity. Most importantly, these programs take on the
 04 charge of training and mobilizing all network participants to work together on
 05 behalf of targeted students, in great part, by guiding them in how to utilize most
 06 effectively the resources and support they have at their disposal (e.g., knowledge
 07 funds, institutional networks, and affiliations across sociocultural domains). To
 08 recap, the following recommendations emerge from our collaborative research
 09 effort:

11 5.9.1. *Reduce Unnecessary Student Mobility*

12
 13 *Accountability mechanisms should be adjusted to take into account
 14 mobile youth.

- 15
- 16 1) Hold schools and districts accountable for students who make non-
- 17 promotional school changes
- 18 2) Report school-level cohort mobility rates
- 19

20 5.9.2. *Develop Social Capital*

21
 22 *Effective school reform programs must be predicated on a *social paradigm*, one
 23 in which it is understood that *social relationships* are dramatically important to
 24 low-status Latinos.

- 25
- 26 1) Build upon relationally driven programs including *Alas*, the *Puente Project*,
- 27 and *AVID*
- 28 2) Bolster school guidance counseling by reducing the student/counselor ratio
- 29 3) Facilitate home-school connections
- 30 4) Foster peer relations that *bridge* nativity status and social class barriers
- 31 5) Develop teacher-counselor networks
- 32 6) Weave the broader community into the fabric of the school experience
- 33

34 The growing prosperity gap within the U.S., accompanied by global labor
 35 market changes, make the consequences of school failure and persistent
 36 underachievement an increasingly serious problem in the age of information-
 37 technology. As the U.S. economy has shifted from producing goods to service
 38 employment and high-tech information processing, well-paying jobs for the
 39 under-skilled have largely disappeared. The negative consequences will not only

40
 41
 42 ⁷ See Stanton-Salazar's discussion of "counterstratification" influences (with the student,
 43 the family, school, and community) that act to both 'buffer' the student from negative
 44 ecological forces (e.g., gang violence) and to cultivate key forms of resiliency among
 45 low-status youth (2001, p. 22). See also Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) for an extended
 critical review on existing research on resiliency.

01 be felt among minorities for whom the U.S. educational and political economy
 02 has proven to be especially marginalizing, but also by the nation as a whole—
 03 particularly in terms of loss of human resources and erosion of democratic
 04 participation. The *mobility/social capital dynamic* is both a symptom of a “nation
 05 at risk,” and an opportune point of departure for serious school reform.

06 In this chapter, we have emphasized the importance of changing basic features
 07 of school accountability schemes to better address the problematic incidence of
 08 student transience among adolescent Latinos. And we have also recommended
 09 an intervention approach oriented toward increasing their stocks of empower-
 10 ing forms of social capital. However, we must also assert that these reform
 11 efforts will not alone solve the inter-connected problems of student mobility,
 12 social *de-capitalization*, and academic underperformance among Latino youth.
 13 Social reforms that address working-class income and wealth disparities must
 14 accompany more direct school reform efforts (Anyon, 2005). Broad economic
 15 indicators suggest, however, that market forces and domestic social policy have
 16 been marching, for some time, in just the opposite direction (Congressional
 17 Budget Office, 2003). Without a renewed commitment to economic and political
 18 reforms designed to stymie growing resource inequality,⁸ Latino youth will
 19 continue to demonstrate high mobility patterns and suffer its attendant adverse
 20 effects in spite of thoughtful strategies designed to augment students’ social
 21 capital and promote their school success.

22

23

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44 ⁸ See Richard Rothstein (2004) for recommended social and economic reforms geared
 45 toward forging a more effective and meritocratic system of education.

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