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**Latin@ Students in a Changing Chicago:
Current Disparities and Opportunities within Public Schools**

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Abstract

In Chicago, the growing community of Latin@s mirrors national demographic trends and is a third of the city's population and nearly half of the public school population. We use Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to critique the discourse of progress from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) press releases and online information while examining the types of schools attended by most Latin@ students. Our findings include continued severe school segregation, lack of proportional matriculation to selective enrollment and advanced placement programs, and other disparities that counter a discourse of greater choice and opportunity available for Latin@s. We highlight some initiatives from CPS related to Latin@s, point out their shortcomings, as well as discuss the research base for policies that do support positive educational outcomes for Latin@s, such as increasing the number of teachers from Latin@ communities, implementing ethnic studies programs, and providing multilingual education. Examining the schooling options in CPS for a growing Latin@ student body is important as the city plays a central role in educational policy formation and implementation nationwide.

Key words: Latin@ students, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Chicago, school choice, segregation

Introduction

During the fall of 2014, the U.S. public school system became majority minority. For the first time, nationwide, more than half of the students in public schools were students of color (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/08/20/01demographics.h34.html>). As the Latin@ population grows in the U.S., so does the share of the number of Latin@ children who attend public schools (immigrant and U.S. born). In Southwest states, like California and Texas, Latin@s are more than half of public school students. In states like New York and Illinois, they make up more than a quarter of the total public school student enrollment (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In the largest urban public school districts (i.e., New York City Department of Education, Los Angeles Unified, Houston Independent School District), Latin@s make up more than half of the total enrollment.

As of 2014, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) served 400,000 students in 658 schools and was the nation's third-largest school district. As of the 2015-16 school year, CPS is over 90% students of color, with 86% of students economically disadvantaged. Chicago is a particularly important city to study, as it highlights the growing community of Latin@s outside of the Southwest, and contributes to scholarship that continues to “complicate the usual binary of Black/White understanding of race in the United States” (Fernandez, 2012). With 45.6% of students being Latin@ in Chicago Public Schools, it is pertinent to examine how schooling provides opportunities or creates barriers for these students. Moreover, Chicago has also taken a central role in educational policy formation nationwide.

We begin with a historical overview of how schools have socialized, and contributed to the marginalization of Latin@s in this country. We then describe Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), in order to highlight the history of advocacy for education in Chicago Latin@ communities and frame our critique of CPS' discourse of choice. Next, we present Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student demographic data to demonstrate deepening school segregation, under-enrollment of Latin@s in magnet and selective enrollment schools, and increase in military schools. We discuss initiatives coming from the district that focus on Latin@s, but also point out shortcomings. We conclude by citing research about how to create

more equitable opportunities for Latin@ students, including increasing the number of teachers from Latin@ communities, implementing ethnic studies programs, and providing multilingual education.

Schools as Socializing and Subjugating Spaces

Scholars have long documented the socializing role that schools play in the lives of students. Specifically, schools have been institutions in which students of color are policed, segregated, and subjected to higher standards of accountability (Anyon, 1997; Apple, 1982; Oakes, 2005). School socialization is often structured along racial lines, and in the U.S., “schools are key players where we sort, order, and differentially equip our children along racial lines” (Pollock, 2009, p. 4). Educational opportunities for students of color in inner cities often prepare them for low-skill, low-wage work. Vocational programs, for example, are often offered to students from working-class backgrounds, while children of professionals are tracked to more advanced courses (González, 2013; Lipman, 2011). It is through this lens of socialization that we strive to understand the ways public schools participate in shaping the experiences of Latin@s in the city of Chicago.

Historical Segregation of Latin@s in U.S. Schools

The history of segregation in this country is often recounted as revolving almost entirely around White and African American students, yet Latin@ communities have an equally elaborate history of segregationist educational policies (Morales, Trujillo & Kissell, in press). San Miguel and Valencia (1998) detail the forced school segregation and curricular tracking of Mexicans in the Southwest since that geographic region was annexed by the United States in 1848, making the Mexicans living there legally U.S. citizens. One of the ways Southwestern school districts rationalized this segregation was on Mexican American children’s linguistic and cultural differences, arguing that they had different educational needs and were “slower” than Anglo American children (González, 2013). This historical and consistent segregation in one of the nation’s most important institutions (schools) sent the message that Latin@s were second-class citizens (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Presently, schools in urban districts are more segregated than before the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003). Despite the implementation of educational reforms aimed at increasing student achievement, students of color have experienced limited gains in educational resources and outcomes. Thus, various forms of unequal access correspond with discriminatory school-based structures and practices that continue to shape the experiences of Latin@s in public schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2006).

Critical Race Theory & Latin@ Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) derives from a long tradition of resistance to unequal distribution of power. It is used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). In education, scholars have turned to CRT to examine how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. Latin@ Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) was developed in response to issues related to the Latin@ experience in the United States, such as immigration, language rights, and feelings of citizenship or belonging (Valdes, 1997). Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010) explored the sociopolitical context of education policy by examining the status of Latin@s within CPS through the use of a CRT and LatCrit framework. They drew attention to the injustices Latin@s suffered in CPS in the areas of early childhood education, standardized assessment, bilingual education, and push-out rates. Similarly, we use a CRT and LatCrit lens to examine the location of Latin@ students in different types of Chicago public schools. We use the tenets of challenging dominant ideologies (such as colorblind policies), the importance of experiential knowledge, and a commitment to social justice to frame our analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Context and Data Sources

City of Chicago Context

Within the last few decades the population growth of working-class Latin@s, the excessive segregation and displacement of working-class African Americans, and the

growing concentration of White middle-class residents within gentrifying areas of major cities, are just a few of the demographic and social changes that characterize what is happening in many major U.S. cities; Chicago exemplifies these growing trends (Koval, 2006). As Figure 1 shows, the population of Latin@s in Chicago has risen since 1990 and is now about 25% of the total city population, while the African American community has decreased and currently make up about 30% of the total population. While it has fluctuated, the percentage of Whites in the city has increasingly risen over the last 15 years.

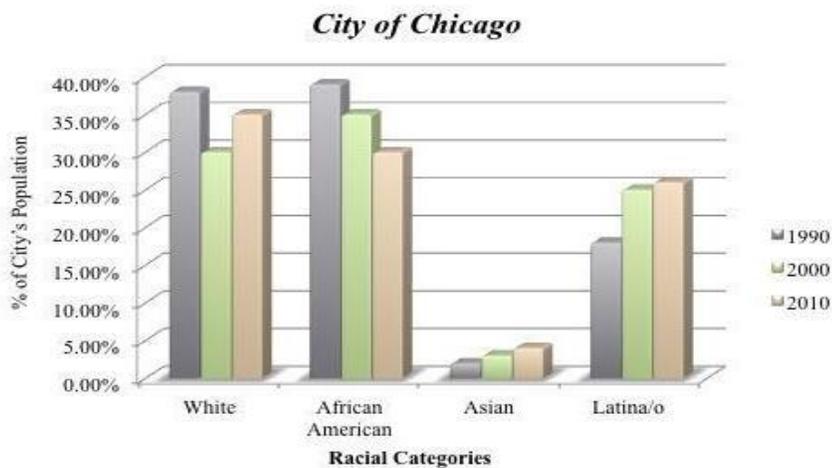


Figure 1. City of Chicago racial/ethnic demographic change since 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015)

A substantive amount of scholarship has documented the ways in which neoliberal urban restructuring has been the primary catalyst for demographic change in cities since the 1970s (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Hackworth, 2007), but there is a dearth of studies that address the experiences of Latin@s in the city of Chicago, and in the larger Midwest. While Latin@s have been a significant part of the city since the 1920s, their presence in the social, economic, and political life of Chicago is just becoming a growing topic of scholarly interest (Alicea, 2001; Betancur, 1996; De Genova, 2005; Fernandez 2012). The following sections will summarize some school

data, in order to better understand the current experiences of Latin@ students in Chicago.

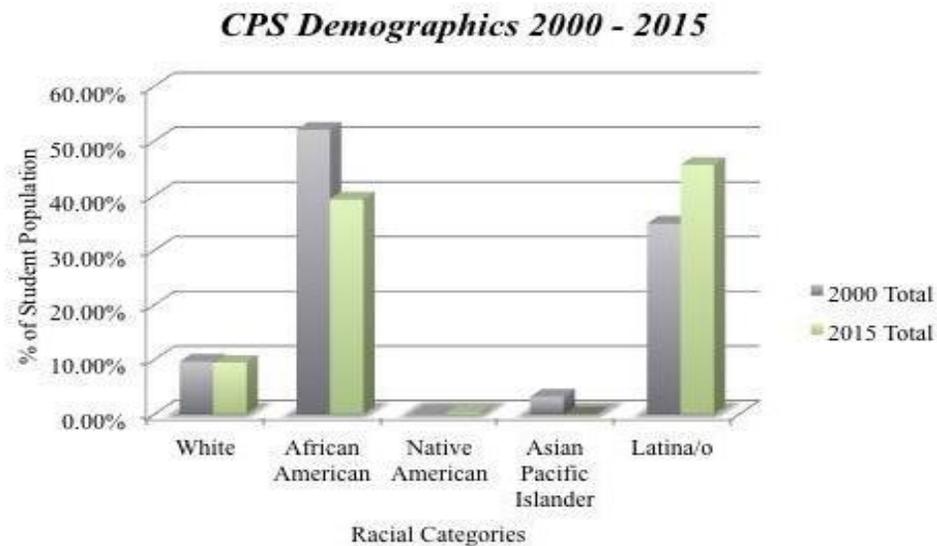


Figure 2. Chicago public school demographics 2000-2015 comparison (<http://cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx>)

Latin@s in Chicago Public Schools

As demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2, although Latin@s make up less than 30% percent of the population in Chicago, they are currently 45.6% of the total public school student enrollment, and one of the racial/ethnic groups that has increased enrollment during the last few decades. Additionally, African Americans are about 30% of the city’s population and 39.3% of the public student enrollment, but have experienced continuous decline in enrollment since 2000.¹ Meanwhile, Whites are about 35% of the city’s population but only 9.4% of the public student enrollment and have remained near this percentage for the past decades.

¹ Scholars have examined the relationship between the demolition of public housing and the displacement of African Americans from major cities in the U.S. In Chicago, the destruction of public housing is also considered a major reason for the decline of African American student enrollment in CPS during the last couple of decades (Lipman, 2008).

Though historically a smaller demographic in public schools, Latin@s have a long history of activism related to educational advocacy in the city that is just beginning to be more thoroughly examined (Ramírez, 2011). From 1968 through the mid-70's students, parents, and other community leaders from the Puerto Rican neighborhood of Humboldt Park organized to address the overcrowding and high dropout rates (70%) in their neighborhood (Pacione-Zayas, 2009). They demanded a new school be built and collaborated with Mexican students, parents, and activists from the Pilsen neighborhood, who at the time were also advocating for a new high school in their barrio (Pacione-Zayas, 2009; Padilla, 1985). As a result of community organizing, Roberto Clemente High School opened in 1974 in Humboldt Park, and Benito Juárez High School² opened in Pilsen in 1977. At the dedication ceremony for Benito Juárez, a banner read, “*La escuela fue construída por el pueblo, no por los políticos - que vayan mucho al diablo* (This school was created by the community, not by the politicians - who can go to hell)” (Ramírez, 2011, p. xxvii).

Decades later in 2001, in the predominantly Latin@ Little Village neighborhood, fourteen parents, grandparents, and community residents staged a nineteen-day hunger strike, demanding the construction of a high school that had long been promised to the community, but remained unfunded. After years of demands that school district leaders create a new school to alleviate overcrowding at the existing neighborhood high school, “the hunger strike was chosen due to its ability to demonstrate the seriousness of the community. It was not a decision couched in desperation. Instead, it was an intensely planned strategy to alert CPS of the community’s staying power” (Stovall, 2006, p. 102). Parents and community residents were repeatedly told that the school district did not have the money to fund a new school at the time but were prompted to increase their activism as millions of dollars had been allocated to the creation of two new selective enrollment high schools in the city.³ After lengthy negotiations, funds were finally allocated to begin construction. The Little Village Lawndale High School opened in 2005.

² The name Benito Juarez has significance for people of Mexican descent because it is the name of the first Mexican president of indigenous descent, serving in office from 1858 to 1872.

³ One of the new selective enrollment high schools, Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, was placed in a highly gentrifying neighborhood; the other, Northside College Preparatory High School, was created in a predominately White and middle-class neighborhood.

Chicago Public Schools' Desegregation Efforts

In 1980, the U.S. Department of Justice determined that CPS was highly segregated and mandated the district to agree to a desegregation consent decree that required, "CPS to implement a voluntary desegregation plan designed to create and maintain as many racially integrated schools as possible" (<http://cps.edu/pages/magenetschoolsconsentdecree.aspx>). In order to meet desegregation mandates, CPS established magnet schools. Magnet schools did not have local attendance boundaries, and students were bused from various areas across the city to meet the required threshold of racially integrated schools. Because CPS had such low White student enrollment, this meant that African American and Latin@ students were bused to predominately White schools (Danns, 2014; Hess, 1984).

By 2009, the federal courts agreed that CPS no longer had to continue with the desegregation consent decree, however, the number of magnet schools and selective enrollment programs continued to grow. Currently, race/ethnicity is no longer used as a metric for admission into selective programs; instead, CPS has created new metrics that take into consideration the socioeconomic status of students' neighborhoods in order to evaluate "equitable" admissions⁴. This will be discussed further below.

Renaissance 2010 and the Rhetoric of School Choice

An influential educational reform that drastically shaped the current landscape of public schooling in Chicago was Renaissance 2010 (Ren10). This district initiative began in 2004 and closed public schools that were determined under-enrolled and/or underperforming and replaced them with 100 new schools, most of which were charter or otherwise privately operated (Lipman & Haines, 2007). Mayor Richard M. Daley assured CPS stakeholders that Ren10 would, "turn around Chicago's most troubled schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city... providing new educational options to underserved communities and relieving school overcrowding in communities experiencing growth" (as quoted in Ayers & Klonsky, 2006). Moreover,

⁴ Metrics used by CPS to evaluate students' neighborhood socio-economic status: 1) Median family income, 2) Single parent households 3) Percentage of households where English is not the first language, 4) Percentage of homeownership, 5) Level of adult educational attainment.

former CEO of CPS and U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, claimed that with the Ren10 initiative, teachers and administrators would be accountable for chronically low-performing schools, and that ultimately students would be given better educational options (Giroux & Saltman, 2009). This discourse ignores much of the research about how school choice often advantages families with more social capital and exacerbates inequalities between more and less resourced communities (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999).

Although twelve years have passed since its enactment, the district continues to push the idea of educational choice and other neoliberal education reforms (Lipman, 2011), particularly through the expansion of charter schools and more specialized school options (i.e., performing art schools, STEM-themed schools, gifted centers, etc.). Educational options are offered by CPS through the Office of Access and Enrollment (OAE), the central office that manages the application, testing, selection and enrollment process (<http://www.cpsoae.org>). Table 1 highlights the most solicited programs.

Table 1

Admissions Requirements for Specialized Schools

| Admission Requirements | Application | Lottery | Standardized Test Scores (NWEA) | OAE Administered Exam |
|---|-------------|---------|---|-----------------------|
| ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Magnet Schools | √ | √ | | |
| Regional Gifted/ Classical Programs | √ | | | √ |
| HIGH SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Military Academies | √ | | √ (Minimum of 48 th percentile in Math and Reading) | √ |
| College and Career Academies | √ | √ | | |
| Selective Enrollment Schools | √ | | √ (Minimum of 24 th percentile in Math and Reading) | √ |
| BOTH ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Charter Schools | √ | √ | | |

Through the OAE, district leaders continue to promote the idea that a larger set of educational options to choose from benefits *all* CPS students, and guarantees that the district is committed to every family having access to such programs and schools. OAE's mission states:

All of Chicago's children and their families deserve access to quality educational options that meet their diverse educational needs and interests... the Office of Access and Enrollment is dedicated to:

Choice: Increasing educational options for parents and students

Equity: Ensuring that all students have equal access to the programs and services available

Service: Meeting needs and exceeding expectations of all stakeholders through efficiency, expertise, courtesy, and accountability

(http://www.cpsoae.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=72702&type=d&termREC_ID=&pREC_ID=121715&hideMenu=0)

Each fall, CPS hosts the Chicago School Fair, which is intended to “give parents and guardians the opportunity to explore all the options for their students” (www.chooseyourfuture.cps.edu). Yet, the Chicago School Fair is usually located in the city's downtown area, not easily accessible to many Latin@ families who reside in the south and southwest sides of the city.

District level educational leaders claim that *all* students have benefitted from the expansion of educational choices, but our review of student and school demographic data show that there is disproportionate enrollment into the different programs and schools by racial/ethnic group. The question guiding this analysis was the following: How can we use a CRT/LatCrit lens to identify current educational opportunity gaps for a large and growing Latin@ student body in Chicago Public Schools?

Data Sources

Primary data for this analysis includes publicly available CPS student and school demographic information (Yearly School Racial/Ethnic Reports available through CPS website), CPS press releases that are found on the district's website, and other CPS public information related to Latin@ education in Chicago (i.e., local news articles and reports).

Who We Are/Authors' Positionality

All three of the authors are Latinas who were born and raised in Illinois, two of whom grew up in Chicago. We understand firsthand what it is like to be racial and linguistic minorities in the United States. Zitlali is the eldest of four daughters to immigrant parents from Jalisco, México. Ramona is a lifelong resident of Chicago whose parents immigrated from the Mexican states of Guanajuato and Zacatecas in the early 1960s to the Humboldt Park community. She attended CPS from the PreK-12th grades, and is the mother of a current CPS student who attends the city's oldest Spanish/English dual language school. Joanna's parents migrated to Chicago from the states of Chihuahua and Jalisco. Her maternal grandmother participated in the *movimiento* during the 1970s and early 80s demanding the opening of a new high school in the Pilsen community, Benito Juarez High School. Both Joanna's parents attended and graduated from Benito Juarez. Joanna attended CPS schools herself and currently has an 11-year-old daughter who attends a gifted program in CPS. As a faculty member and doctoral students at a public research university in Chicago, we have a personal interest in the schooling of Latin@s in Chicago and have a deep sense that public schools might be our last hope in holding on to the 'right to this city' (Harvey, 2003; Lipman, 2011).

Analysis: Segregation, Stratification, and School "Choice"

CPS Student and School Demographic Data

We began with descriptive statistics of students enrolled in CPS schools by race/ethnicity in 2000 and 2015 to demonstrate the change over time. We focus on the change within those years because it is a period of significant Latin@ student growth, as well as drastic educational reform in the city. We utilize a CRT and LatCrit lens to compare the discourse of improved academic opportunities for Latin@ students that the district claims against the reality of school and program placement for Latin@s.

As the data shows, programs that were created to address racially segregated schooling appear now to be part of the structures that continue to increase racial segregation and limit the educational opportunities of Latin@s. Specifically, what is most problematic about the new socioeconomic admissions metrics is that they are used to

keep and attract White middle-class families in the city's public school system (Lipman, 2011). The top slots for the most academically rigorous and well-resourced selective programs are reserved for the students with the highest standardized test scores, and subsequent slots are divided using the socioeconomic metrics created by CPS. As Table 2 demonstrates, the few White students that are in the public school system are admitted and enrolled at high rates into the most well-resourced schools.

Table 2

Student Enrollment by Ethnic/Racial Categories and School Types, 2014-15

| Student Enrollment by Race | White | African American | Asian | Latin@ |
|---|-------|------------------|-------|--------|
| ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Magnet Schools | 15.4% | 40.3% | 4.9% | 36.1% |
| Gifted/Classical Programs ⁵ | 30.1% | 39.1% | 9.5% | 16% |
| HIGH SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Military Academies | 3.4% | 32.2% | 0% | 61.8% |
| College and Career Academies | 1.1% | 76.8% | 0.2% | 21.1% |
| Selective Enrollment Schools | 22.9% | 34.3% | 9.2% | 29.5% |
| BOTH ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 1.6% | 56.4% | 0.9% | 38.7% |

Increased Segregation of Latin@ Students in Predominately Latin@ Schools

As Table 3 demonstrates, since the year 2000, the percentage of Latin@s attending highly segregated public schools has increased. In 2000, 43% of all Latin@s in CPS attended schools that were highly segregated Latin@ schools (85% or more

⁵ Gifted/Classical Programs are located within neighborhood schools, and percentages reflect whole school enrollment. Exact numbers for students enrolled in these programs are not public information, however, there is clear disproportionate enrollment of students by race/ethnicity. Furthermore, Gifted/Classical programs are not offered in neighborhoods that are predominantly Latin@.

Latin@), and by 2015 that number increased to 50% of all Latin@s in CPS. Current school data shows a continued growth in this trend, particularly among elementary school students where more than 60% of Latin@s attend highly segregated schools. Within the last fifteen years, the number of highly segregated Latin@ schools has grown from 79 to 129. Currently, 95% of Latin@s attending charter schools are enrolled in schools that are 85% or more Latin@. Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) document that racially segregated schools often provide less equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color. Thus, the growing trend of hyper-segregation is particularly alarming.

Table 3

Latin@ Students in CPS Schools in 2000 and 2015

| | 2000 | 2015 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total # of Latin@ students/Total # of students | 152,031/435,470 | 180,790/396,683 |
| Percentage of CPS students who are Latin@ | 34.9% | 45.5% |
| Elementary and High Schools with 85%+ Latin@ enrollment/Total # Elementary and High Schools | 79/648 | 129/678 |
| Percentage of Elementary and High Schools with 85%+ Latin@ | 12.2% | 19.0% |
| Total # of Latin@ students enrolled in schools with 85%+ Latin@ enrollment | 65,590 | 91,021 |
| Percentage of Latin@ students enrolled in schools with 85%+ Latin@ enrollment | 43.14% | 50.35% |

Inequitable Educational Stratification through the Expansion of School Choice

CRT and LatCrit provide a critique to school choice policies that purport to be race neutral and colorblind ideologies that further contribute to the marginalization of people of color. In CPS, the race neutral language of school choice masks the deep inequities in access and enrollment to selective and advanced placement programs and schools experienced by Latin@s.

Two of the most prestigious, better-resourced, and academically rigorous educational options in CPS are selective enrollment high schools and elementary gifted programs. But as Table 2 shows, Latin@s have gained little access to these more advanced options, despite the fact that selective enrollment schools and gifted programs expanded in the last fifteen years. From 2000 to 2015, Latin@s remained at 29% of all students enrolled in selective enrollment high schools, and have remained a very small percentage of all students enrolled in gifted elementary programs.

Another educational option expanded as a result of Ren10 were military high schools. In 2000, Chicago had two public military high schools. By 2015, the number grew to six, with one additional school that now admits 7th and 8th grade students. Although Latin@s are underrepresented in many of the advanced educational programs and schools, they are overrepresented in the percentage of students attending military academies, where they make up 61% of all students enrolled. Currently, Chicago has the highest number of public military academies, and the largest number of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs in the U.S. (Pérez, 2015).

Scholars argue that military academies, particularly in poor urban communities, were created to discipline and manage the behavior of youth of color. Public support for military schools is based on the notion that ‘at-risk’ youth, such as poor African Americans and Latin@s, benefit from strict discipline policies that enforce obedience and compliance (Horsley, 2013). Lipman (2003) asserts that what is problematic about military academies is that “there is no place for learning self-determination, collectivity, critical analysis of the world and one’s place in it, or self-control for ethical ends” (p. 348). CPS describes the advantages of military high schools:

Military Academies offer a unique high school option for highly motivated students, providing an academically rigorous curriculum with a focus on leadership and *citizenship*. The Academies' primary goal is to prepare students to attend the four-year college or university of their choice. By allowing them to develop as leaders, Military Academies prepare students for successful careers and a life of *active citizenship*.” [italicized by authors]

(http://www.cpsoae.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=159675&type=d)

For Latin@ youth who may be seen as unAmerican, their willingness to participate in military programs is often prompted by “their desire to be regarded as full citizens” (Pérez, 2015, p. 9). While enrollment into military academies may come with certain advantages, students are nonetheless placed into the military pipeline. More importantly, as Table 2 shows, there is a disparity of enrollment by Latin@s into the more academically advanced or rigorous programs and school options, compared to the military academies.

Families may have more types of schools to choose from in Chicago, but they must navigate a labyrinthine process where parents with more resources, time, and social capital can better participate in this type of application system. Additionally, access to specialized advanced programs is based on scores on standardized tests, which have been proven to be culturally biased (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001), and the socioeconomic standing of their neighborhood. The school choice options are part of a larger colorblind educational policy discourse that acts as a cover-up for the self-interest, control, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Rather than focusing on providing more choices, we ask what CPS could do to provide more equitable educational resources for Latin@ students.

Educational Initiatives in CPS Related to Latin@s

Similar to Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010), we believe “CRT help[s] us create a space that highlights the resistance and hope of Latin@s in CPS while uncovering the struggle and injustice” (p. 40). While there has been recognition of the need to address this growing population of students, few efforts from the district have targeted this group. The rhetoric of choice has been central to education policy in Chicago, but there

is actually a vast literature base in the field of education about what supports positive educational outcomes for Latin@s.

According to U.S. census data, approximately 80% of all ELs in the U.S. are Latin@ (<http://www.nea.org/home/HispanicsEducation%20Issues.htm>). Understanding language issues and providing language supports then continues to be an important issue for Latin@s. Gándara and Contreras (2009) propose that a solution to the challenges of effectively educating English learners (ELs) is hiring qualified teachers from students' own communities. They explain that such teachers may better understand the situations that students face, recognize the resources that exist in those communities, and importantly, are more likely to stay in the job over time (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). Currently, the teaching force is largely White and middle-class. Thus, we should increase the diversity of the teaching force in general and specifically support efforts to increase teachers coming from the communities serving Latin@s.

In Chicago, the employment of Latin@ teachers (19.7% of Chicago teachers) and Latin@ principals (15.6%) has not kept pace with the increase of Latin@ student enrollment (45.6%). However, a significant group has emerged within the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). In October 2013, the Chicago's Teacher Union Latino Caucus was established by "self-identified Latino educational workers across the district that were seeking to put their collective power and voice to work for a just and equitable public education system for all, regardless of legal or socioeconomic status" (Sepulveda, 2015, p. 22). This group has advocated for educators to get involved with transforming the educational attainment of all students. Teachers in this group have collaborated to look at issues such as teacher professional development, standardized testing, and policy and practices within CPS.

In February 2014, CPS announced the formation of the Latino Advisory Committee (LAC), "the district's first-ever, Latino-focused task force designed to increase engagement with the Latino community and to enhance the educational success of Latino students," (http://cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/PR2_01_04_2014.aspx). According to the press release, LAC was to unite Chicago Latino leaders to provide support for Latin@ students, teachers, administrators, and families by making "recommendations to the CEO on policies, programs and curriculum that would affect

the Latino community, including students and parents who are English Learners (ELs)”. However, CPS administration appointed executive directors of community non-profits, city investors, and local university faculty to the LAC and no CPS teachers or parents.

In recent years, more research has shown that students whose experiences are not valued by their teachers, peers, and educational institutions are less likely to become connected to school. Ethnic studies classes have been shown to increase graduation rates and matriculation to higher education (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette & Marx, 2014). They have been adopted, and in some cases required, in Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, and San Francisco. In March 2015, CPS administration introduced the Interdisciplinary Latino and Latin American Studies Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes the arts, culture, and history of Latin@s and Latin Americans (<http://catalyst-chicago.org/2015/03/latino-studies-curriculum-will-make-cps-a-pioneer/>). However, after this high-profile rollout, CPS administration did not provide trainings for teachers or otherwise encourage implementation in schools. While intended to be accessible to CPS teachers, it is unclear what may become of this curriculum.

In addition to ethnic studies, CPS should provide more opportunities for multilingualism for all (Morales & Razfar, 2016), especially when such a large proportion of the student body is already bilingual or emergent bilingual. Offering more dual immersion programs would support bilingual students’ retention of their first language, as well as potentially be another way to encourage the integration of linguistically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse students.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have discussed the importance of examining the educational options available in a large public school system such as Chicago, where almost a third of the city’s population is Latin@. The student population served by the school district is over 90% students of color, but it has been largely absent in the Latin@ education literature. Despite the discourse of progress and greater opportunity coming from the central office of CPS, Latin@ students are largely not receiving the type of education that research suggests would be most beneficial.

Upon our review of the student population in CPS, we find that Latin@s are still

quite segregated and concentrated in particular schools, despite past efforts at desegregation. Furthermore, while CPS has increased the types of schools available to students, we find that Latin@s are clustering into military academies and are underrepresented in the most prestigious programs and schools. We argue that increasing educational options for Latin@s does not equate to improving the educational resources and outcomes for these students. Latin@ students need more from their public institutions than empty rhetoric, and they need it now. A LatCrit social justice perspective highlights the importance of considering race, culture, and language as part of the process that will more positively address educational equity for Latin@ youth in Chicago Public Schools.

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