

Cause or Effect? A Longitudinal Study of Immigrant Latino Parents' Aspirations and Expectations, and Their Children's School Performance

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How much formal schooling for their children do immigrant Latino parents aspire to and expect? Do parents' aspirations or expectations influence children's school achievement? Do aspirations or expectations diminish the longer parents are in the U.S. or if they experience discrimination? Using quantitative and qualitative methods, we address these questions in a longitudinal study (kindergarten to sixth grade) of 81 Latino children and their immigrant parents. We find that (a) parents' educational aspirations are high and invariant throughout the elementary years; however, expectations fluctuate; (b) children's school performance influences parents' expectations, but expectations do not influence performance; and (c) immigrant Latino parents attribute high instrumental value to formal schooling, and neither time spent in the U.S. nor perceived discrimination diminishes this belief.

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“Students will rise to their level of expectations.” This is what mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante tells his skeptical colleagues in the popular 1980s film *Stand and Deliver*. He was describing a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” the term coined by Robert Merton in a 1948 essay and later popularized in numerous educational studies. This idea has had a significant impact on schools and U.S. society (Brophy, 1983; Cooper & Good, 1983; Dusek, 1985; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985; Jussim, 1986; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). Holding high expectations has become “conventional wisdom for motivating students [and] a watchword in the movement to raise achievement” (Willis, 1991, p. 4).

In the classic formulation, parents as well as teachers are said to create “self-fulfilling prophecies” as a result of their aspirations (the educational level they *hope* their child attains) or their expectations (level the child is *realistically expected* to attain) (Coleman, 1988; Duran & Weffer, 1992; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991). Parental prophecies can be fulfilled by their children’s academic achievements in various ways, a correlation documented in many studies, e.g., students taking additional and enriched academic work perceive greater parental encouragement to attend college (Duran & Weffer, 1992); students reporting their parents expect them to attain college or advanced degrees are more likely to pass basic achievement tests than students whose parents expect only high school completion (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991); students whose mothers expect college attendance are half as likely to drop out between grades 10 and 12 as students whose mothers do not expect college attendance (Coleman, 1988). Such results have been interpreted to mean that students’ achievement levels can be improved by improving family attitudes toward schooling, such as parents’ educational aspirations and their expectations for children (Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988).

A reformulation of the classic “self-fulfilling prophecy” hypothesis has been extended to immigrant Latino parents whose children were born or reared in the United States (C. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1996; Rumbaut, 1995). In this reformulation, immigrant Latino parents are said to develop low aspirations and expectations for their children because of ambivalent attitudes about the benefits of formal education. According to this argument, a lack of faith in the instrumental value of schooling leads immigrant Latino parents to transmit diminished aspirations and expectations to their children. Intentionally or not, this transmission dampens children’s achievement motivation and produces “low academic effort syndrome,” which in turn results in children’s lowered school performance (Ogbu, 1978; 1982; 1987). “[E]ven young children,” Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1986) write, “will begin to form their image of the connection or lack of connection between school success and future employment” (p. 127). If this reformulation is correct, then low aspirations and expectations of parents could help explain the persistent and well-documented underachievement of Latino children of immigrant parents (Goldenberg, 1996; Kao & Tienda, 1995).

Ogbu, Suárez-Orozco, and others argue that immigrant Latino parents develop lowered aspirations and expectations for children’s educational at-

tainment not because they believe their children have limited potential (e.g., Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Rather, parents' diminished aspirations and expectations stem from the discrimination and lowered job opportunities they experience in the United States, which in turn might dilute the benefits they can expect formal schooling to provide their children. Although immigrant parents might come to the United States with high regard for the instrumental value of education, recent studies conclude that the longer they are exposed to U.S. society, the more they display a pattern of lowered expectations *and* the less successful their children are in school (C. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1996; Rumbaut, 1995). Because of these dynamics, according to this argument, the achievement expectations and patterns of children of immigrants become similar to those of nonimmigrant or involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1978, 1982, 1987). As happened with its classic predecessor, this version of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" has begun to appear in the popular press as an explanation for low achievement levels among immigrant and later-generation youth, e.g., "Immigrants arrive with tremendous positive energy. But the more exposed they are [to American life], the more their dreams fade" (Woo, 1996, p. A19).

Expectations, Achievement, and Latino Immigrant Families: Another Look

The inference that Latino parents' educational aspirations or expectations *cause* lower student performance, however, is a theoretical interpretation of correlational data. Studies of immigrant Latinos and their descendants are limited by the same design weakness found in the "self-fulfilling" prophecy literature more generally. Correlational designs make it virtually impossible to rule out competing causal interpretations (Mitman and Snow, 1985). Do parents' expectations *influence* children's school performance? Or does children's school performance *influence* parents' expectations? Or is the influence bidirectional? Another major limitation of many influential studies of disaffected minority students—immigrant and nonimmigrant alike (e.g., Ogbu, 1978, 1982, 1987; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; C. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1996)—is that they have been conducted with adolescents in middle or high school. Late in their school careers, students have established fairly clear patterns and trajectories of achievement (Bloom, 1964), which themselves are likely to influence their own and their parents' attitudes about future educational outcomes. To infer a causal link from parent beliefs to child performance based on data provided by older students is based on a theoretical interpretation about the direction of effects, not the data themselves. The opposite direction of effects is equally plausible: Low (or high) student achievement might contribute to low (or high) aspirations or expectations.

In fact, such a competing prediction can be formulated from cognitive motivation theories (e.g., Deci, 1975; Stipek, 1993; Weiner, 1980). Cognitive motivation theories suggest that when people feel successful and competent

in a setting, they are likely to value and expect success in that setting, remain in it, and work hard at continuing to succeed. When they feel unsuccessful, however, they tend to de-value its importance, leave the setting if they can, not work hard if they remain, and certainly not expect high levels of performance or benefits resulting from high levels of performance. Accordingly, students (and their families) who have done well in school are likely to want and expect even higher levels of school attainment; students who have done poorly are less likely to hold high expectations for future success. Thus, a major confound in studies examining the “effects” of family aspirations and expectations on student achievement is that these values are themselves likely to be influenced by earlier patterns of student achievement. Absent longitudinal designs, a correlation of parent expectation and child performance, can just as well be interpreted as evidence that high or low student performance *causes or contributes to* raised or lowered parental expectations.

There is more at stake than a point of theory here. If the well-documented poor achievement of many Latino youth in middle and high school is the result of low motivation rooted in perceptions of discrimination and structural inequalities, these students’ achievement can be improved in one of only two ways—either by altering these inequalities or by somehow motivating students to do their best in school in the face of them. If, however, parents’ expectations for their children’s educational attainment are influenced by children’s actual school performance—that is, expectations rise or remain high as children do well or show motivation and interest in school, and they decline or remain low when children do poorly or show little motivation or interest in school—this suggests a very different scenario. It suggests that educators should rethink the logical and empirical basis for the widespread belief that Latino students do poorly in school because of their parents’ low educational aspirations and expectations. It further suggests that educators should shift their concerns from factors over which teachers have little control, such as parent values and beliefs, to features over which they do have control, such as the instructional program. We will return to the issue of improving achievement for this population in the concluding section.

The purpose of this paper is to explore this relationship between parents’ aspirations and expectations for their children’s eventual school attainment and children’s school performance during elementary school. The data were obtained during the course of a longitudinal study of a random sample of immigrant Latino families and their mostly United States-born children. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the children were tracked from the beginning of kindergarten through the beginning of sixth grade. In addition to demographic information, we also collected information annually on parent aspirations (ideal level) and expectations (realistic level) for children’s educational attainment, parent ratings of child interest and progress in school, teacher ratings of child performance, and children’s achievement test scores. We conducted qualitative interviews with

a subset of families (case studies). The study's longitudinal design and use of qualitative and quantitative methods permitted a detailed examination of parental expectations and student school performance from the beginning through the end of elementary school, and thus provided a way of detecting initial and changing patterns of relationships. Case study materials gathered through numerous in-depth and semistructured home interviews were used to support inferences about causal relations between parents' aspirations and expectations, and their children's school performance.

The Relationship Between Expectations and Achievement: Contrasting Models

The design of the study permitted comparison of two models of the causal relationships between parents' aspirations and expectations on the one hand and children's school performance on the other. Two contrasting unidirectional models were specified. The first model specifies that parent aspirations/expectations influence student performance (hereafter referred to as the "expectations-driven model"). The second unidirectional model specifies that student performance influences parent aspiration/expectation (hereafter referred to as the "performance-driven model"). We a priori predicted the data would support the performance-driven model better than the expectations-driven model (Goldenberg, Reese, Balzano, & Gallimore, 1993). Specifically, we predicted that when children began formal schooling, their immigrant parents would hold high aspirations and relatively high expectations for children's future educational attainment. We also predicted that, over the course of elementary school, an increasingly positive correlation would emerge between parental expectations and child achievement. We based this prediction on the assumption that as children's school performance reveals itself, parents adjust their expectations accordingly.

We also examined the role that exposure to U.S. society played in the formation of parents' expectations and aspirations, thus permitting another explicit comparison of the expectations- and performance-driven models. With parents' time of residence in the United States ranging from 1 to 27 years when the study began in 1989 (7–33 years by the end of their children's elementary school years), parents in our sample exhibited variable exposure to U.S. society. If the expectations-driven model fits the data for Latino families, there should be correlations among exposure to U.S. society, parental aspirations/expectations, and child performance. This prediction is based on the argument that the longer Latino immigrants are in the United States, the more they encounter the discriminatory practices experienced by native-born United States citizens of Mexican-descent that may reduce belief in the instrumental value of education and lead to lowered expectations for children's school attainment (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; C. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1996). We also correlated parents' direct reports of discrimination in the United States with their educational

expectations and children's school performance. If, however, the performance-driven model is a better fit, then neither exposure to U.S. society nor reports of discrimination should be related to either expectations or performance at any point during elementary school. Finally, we expected and tested the hypothesis that regardless of exposure to U.S. society, early in their child's school careers parents hold high initial aspirations and expectations partly because they believe more education leads to better occupational and economic opportunities.

Methods

Sample

The 81 cases used in this study were recruited in fall 1989 for a study of Latino children's school careers from kindergarten through middle school. The 81 cases were part of a longitudinal sample comprising 121 kindergartners (66 boys and 55 girls) and their families randomly selected from an initial pool of 296 to whom letters were sent by the schools inviting them to participate. Letters were sent to the parents of all children who, upon entry into kindergarten, were to be placed in Spanish-language reading instruction through ordinary school procedures. The project had no input regarding children's instructional placement. Two hundred fifty-two (85%) of the 296 parents returned the letter indicating willingness to participate in our study.

From the pool of 252, we contacted in random order a total of 154 families to construct a final longitudinal cohort of 121 families whose children were scheduled to be placed in Spanish-language reading instruction at the time the study began. Of the 154 families we attempted to recruit, 27 cases could not be contacted (6 moved, 6 had no phone, and the other 15 could not be reached after several efforts), 5 families declined to participate, and 1 family was excluded because they had asked that their child be placed in an English-only instructional program at the school.

Our sample constitutes part of a highly mobile student population. During the course of their children's elementary school years, 55 of the original 121 families moved out of the original school districts. Of these, we were able to maintain contact with 28 in their new home and school settings, and they were retained in the study. However, it was not possible in all cases to obtain full sets of performance data on these students who moved from the original sampling districts. By the end of elementary school (grade 5), 90 families remained in the study. Of the original 121, 27 had moved and been lost and 4 had voluntarily withdrawn. At the time the analyses reported here were conducted (children had begun grade 6), 81 cases were available with complete data for parents' expectations and most of the child's school performance data.

Comparison of the 81 cases with complete data with the 40 cases excluded from these analyses (30 were no longer participating in the project;

10 had more than 2 years of achievement data missing) indicated no significant differences at entry in mother's or father's education or family income. The 81 children with complete data did not have significantly different reading skills entering kindergarten but had significantly higher reading skills at the end of kindergarten (mean = 0.12 ± 0.98 for children retained in the sample compared to a mean = -0.28 ± 1.01 for children missing from the sample, $p < .05$), and beginning and ending kindergarten teacher ratings (for beginning kindergarten: mean = 0.19 ± 0.91 for children retained compared to a mean = 0.25 ± 1.07 for children missing from the sample, $p < .05$; for ending kindergarten: mean = 0.18 ± 0.89 for children retained compared to a mean = -0.23 ± 1.01 for children missing from the sample, $p < .05$). Children in the present analyses did not differ otherwise from the total sample.

At the time of recruitment, all children were enrolled in 1 of 13 kindergarten classrooms in two Los Angeles area school districts (Lawson & Sandy Beach, both pseudonyms). In addition, from the cohort of 121 families, a subset of 32 families was randomly selected for a case study subset. A statistical comparison of the total sample and case study subset on entry data indicated no significant differences in parents' country of origin, child's country of birth, length of time parents had lived in the United States, or in parents' years of schooling. There were also no statistically significant differences on entering kindergarten skills or teacher ratings of academic performance and potential.

Among the 81 cases used in this report, most of the parents were born in Mexico (85% and 90% of mothers and fathers, respectively). Most of the rest were from Central America (11% and 10% of mothers and fathers, respectively). The Mexican-origin parents in our sample tend to follow an earlier migration pattern identified by Cornelius (1989–1990), with most coming from the Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacan, and Zacatecas. When the study began in 1989, mothers in the sample averaged 9.9 years of residence (range = 1–27) in the United States; fathers averaged 11.7 years (range = 1–21). The average number of years of formal schooling for mothers and fathers was virtually identical, with an aggregate mean of 7.1 years (range = 1–13). Parents' occupations tend to cluster in the lower levels of occupation within each census category: service (mothers = 28%; fathers = 35%); repair (mothers = 3%; fathers = 22%); and laborer (mothers = 16%; fathers = 41%). Fifty-three percent of mothers described their work as homemaker. In contrast to their parents, the majority of the children were born in California (74%). Nearly 24% of the children were born in Mexico, with a small number born in Central America. All of the children commenced their formal education in the United States. Additional details on the original sampling procedure for both the cohort and the case subset as well as descriptions of the communities and families have been presented elsewhere (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995).

Procedures

Families were interviewed either by phone or in person 10 times between the time their child entered kindergarten and completed fifth grade. The interviewers (16 in all over the 6 years of this portion of the study) were all fluent speakers of Spanish. Nine of the 16 interviewers were either first- or second-generation Latino immigrants themselves. Interviewers worked with the project a minimum of 3 years and were able to establish a relationship of *confianza*, or trust, with the families, especially those participating in the case study subset (described below). Over the years, all of the families were interviewed by both Latino and non-Latino fieldworkers. We have no indication that responses differed depending on the ethnicity of the interviewer. On the contrary, after several years of visiting the families, both Latino and non-Latino fieldworkers heard many personal stories from the parents, including fairly intimate details not part of our interview protocol.

In-person contacts were made with all families in fall 1989, spring 1993, and spring 1995, during which times we conducted home visits to complete extended interviews of approximately 2 hr duration. Typically, either the father or the mother participated in the interview, although it was not uncommon for both to participate. Each fall and spring, with the exception of the home interview dates listed above, each family participated in a telephone interview of 15–30 min in length. During these visits and phone contacts, we asked parents about their child's progress; their aspirations and expectations for children's school attainment; their beliefs about the role of schooling in children's future success; factors they considered important for student academic success, e.g., children's interest; and the role parents and teachers play in school achievement. We also asked about actions parents were or were not taking with regard to their children's schooling and learning.

In addition to the contacts described above, case study families were visited at home on 12 additional occasions for extended semistructured interviews from 1989 to 1993. For these families, fieldworkers conducted detailed and relatively informal interviews designed to explore more subtle and complex aspects of parents' cultural models of schooling and views about education (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Reese, Balzano, et al., 1995). In this study, the case study data complements interpretation of quantitative results obtained for the full sample.

Assessments and Instruments

Longitudinal data on families and children were collected each year from 1989 to 1995 (with the exception noted below) using parent interviews, teacher ratings, and school records. Descriptive statistics for longitudinal assessments are presented in Table 1.

Parent aspirations/expectations and perceptions. Each year from kindergarten through sixth grade, parents were asked in fall interviews for their

Table 1
**Descriptive Statistics of Parent and Child Measures from
 Pre-kindergarten to Grade 6**

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Fall kindergarten: 1989				
Average of parents' years in the U.S.	77	10.83	4.80	1.00–24.00
Parent aspirations	81	5.64	0.76	3.00–6.00
Parent expectations	81	4.54	1.76	0.00–6.00
Teacher ratings of child	81	0.16	0.86	-1.85–1.40
Entering kindergarten literacy test	81	0.04	0.94	-1.70–3.13
Child school interest rating (parent)	81	5.98	1.19	2.00–7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent)	81	4.09	0.64	3.00–5.00
Grade 1: 1990–1991				
Parent aspirations	79	5.52	0.95	1.00–6.00
Parent expectations	81	4.00	1.99	0.00–6.00
Teacher ratings of child	81	0.08	0.91	-2.14–1.20
Reading achievement	81	51.07	29.11	3.00–97.00
Mathematics achievement	81	48.19	24.69	2.00–93.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	77	6.32	1.01	2.00–7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent)	80	5.52	1.04	3.00–7.00
Grade 2: 1991–1992				
Parent aspirations	79	5.44	1.13	0.00–6.00
Parent expectations	81	3.55	2.37	0.00–6.00
Teacher ratings of child	81	0.09	0.96	-2.25–1.34
Reading achievement	80	47.35	25.34	2.00–99.00
Mathematics achievement	80	39.28	25.21	1.00–92.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	79	5.98	1.27	2.00–7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent)	80	5.40	1.37	1.00–7.00
Grade 3: 1992–1993				
Parent aspirations	81	5.64	0.84	3.00–6.00
Parent expectations	81	3.62	2.42	0.00–6.00
Teacher ratings of child	81	0.07	0.98	-1.76–1.64
Reading achievement	80	36.32	22.36	1.00–98.00
Mathematics achievement	80	40.63	27.25	2.00–99.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	81	5.69	1.22	3.00–7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent)	81	4.06	0.76	1.00–5.00
Grade 4: 1993–1994				
Parent aspirations	81	5.64	0.83	1.00–6.00
Parent expectations	81	3.77	1.89	0.00–6.00
(Teacher ratings not available)				
Reading achievement ^a	79	29.63	20.81	2.00–88.00
Mathematics achievement ^a	79	39.58	27.34	1.00–97.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	79	5.78	1.28	3.00–7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent) ^b	81	1.22	1.29	0.00–5.00

(Continued)

aspirations and expectations for the participating child. Specifically, at each point they were asked, "How far do you want your child to go in his/her

Table 1 (Continued)

Variables	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Grade 5: 1994-1995				
Perceived discrimination	77	1.71	1.99	0.00-7.00
Parent aspirations	78	5.59	1.06	0.00-6.00
Parent expectations	81	3.48	2.27	0.00-6.00
Teacher ratings of child	81	0.07	0.98	-2.05-2.07
Reading achievement ^c	68	29.01	20.64	1.00-91.00
Mathematics achievement ^c	68	43.17	26.28	2.00-99.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	80	4.20	1.91	2.00-7.00
Child academic progress rating (parent)	78	5.54	1.37	3.00-7.00
Grade 6: fall 1995				
Parent aspirations	76	5.55	1.18	0.00-6.00
Parent expectations	76	3.85	2.19	0.00-6.00
Child school interest rating (parent)	78	6.09	1.78	3.00-7.00

^aDescriptive statistics for 1994 achievement scores computed on $N = 79$.

^bAcademic progress rating by parent available in fall 1994 only.

^cDescriptive statistics for 1995 achievement scores computed on $N = 68$.

formal schooling?" (aspiration) and "How far do you think your child will go in his/her formal schooling?" (expectation). Spanish versions of these questions were piloted and refined and used as follows in the interviews: "*¿Hasta qué nivel quisiera usted que su hijo/a llegara en sus estudios?*" and "*¿Hasta qué nivel cree usted que su hijo/a llegará en sus estudios?*" For each question, parents were offered six choices: finish elementary, finish middle school, finish high school, attend trade school, attend university, or finish university. Responses were coded as 6 = *complete university*, 5 = *attend university*, etc. Interview protocols also included, at the beginning of kindergarten and at the end of third grade, questions about parents' views regarding the instrumental value of education.

Student school performance. Five estimates of child performance were obtained for each year of elementary school: Parents' perception of child's (1) school interest and (2) academic progress, (3) teacher's rating of student performance, and (4) reading and (5) math achievement test scores.

For teacher ratings, with the exception of 1 year (1994) when an interruption in project funding prevented collection of teacher ratings, teachers were asked to rate the children on 4 items (academic progress this year, progress in reading/language arts, interest/motivation, and learning ability) on a 1-7 scale (1 = *very poor* to 7 = *very good*). Principal component analysis indicated the four items tapped a single underlying dimension. Nearly identical loadings were obtained for each administration of the Teacher Rating Scale (TRAT). The single factor scores extracted for each year's rating data were used as the teacher ratings of student performance for the analyses in this report.

Achievement at the beginning and end of kindergarten was tested using a Spanish language literacy assessment developed for the project because Spanish was the primary language of all participating children. The assessment was administered individually to children over 2 days in two 30-min sessions. Factor analysis was used to construct a single dimension of literacy development from six subtests: oral comprehension of story read aloud; phonemic/syllabic awareness; knowledge of letter names and sounds; concepts about print (Clay, 1985; translated into Spanish); ability to write letters and words; and knowledge of terms book (and what a book is used for), letter, word, and rhyme.

Subsequent estimates of children's tested achievement used nationally standardized reading and math scores recorded in cumulative records, and obtained with permission of parents. Although most children remained in the original districts from which the sample was selected, others moved to different districts in the course of the study. Thus, nine different standardized achievement tests were used. Most of scores obtained were from the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE) for students tested in Spanish and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT6) for students tested in English. Other tests administered to students in our sample were Stanford Achievement Test, California Achievement Test, Woodcock-Johnson, California Assessment System (CAS², including the Individual Tests of Academic Skills [ITAS]) in English and the *Aprenda* in Spanish.

Most of the students followed the typical pattern for Spanish-dominant students in many bilingual education programs in Southern California: Students were placed in programs of literacy instruction in Spanish and tested in Spanish until third or fourth grade, at which point transition to English instruction began. Transition to English reading instruction is based on the individual child's progress, thus the time of transition varies among students and is largely completed by the end of fourth grade. Some students, however, were placed in programs of English instruction earlier than third grade, either because assessment results indicated that their oral English proficiency warranted initial placement in English instruction or because the school did not provide adequate staffing of Spanish language programs. For this reason, some participating students were tested in English (20%) as early as first grade when the remaining 80% were tested in Spanish. The numbers tested in Spanish declined to 72, 41, 17, and 13%, as students progressed, respectively, from grades 2 through 5. Whether in English or Spanish, children's literacy achievement was assessed in the language in which they were receiving classroom instruction.

There was some variation among cooperating schools in the times testing was conducted. Generally, children's reading and mathematics achievement tests were administered in the spring near the end of the school year. In one school district, however, a change in policy in 1991 resulted in achievement tests being administered in the fall of the following school year. For children in this district, we used fall scores as proxies for their achieve-

ment at the end of the previous school year. For the analyses in this article, we used percentile scores based on national norming samples reported by test publishers.

Parent perceptions of their child's school performance were obtained directly from parents during interviews conducted in the fall and spring of the school year. We asked parents each year to rate their children's interest in school and their academic progress for that school year. For both perception of child interest and current year academic progress, parents were asked to rate their children using a 1–7 point scale (1 = *very low*; 7 = *very high*). With two exceptions, we used ratings of child's interest collected in the fall of each school year and ratings of child's academic progress collected in the spring. The two exceptions include grade 1 school interest ratings for which parallel data were available only in the spring, and grade 4 academic progress ratings for which data were available only in the fall.

Exposure to U.S. society. Exposure to U.S. society was estimated by averaging mother's and father's years of residence in the United States. In addition, during the Ecocultural Family Interview conducted at the conclusion of the child's elementary school (spring 1995), parents were asked to describe any recent experiences of discrimination or concerns that their child would be discriminated against. Using an established protocol, these reports were rated by the interviewer on a 0–8 scale, assessing the extent to which parents expressed the belief that their child needs protection from discrimination and/or negative social attitudes. Ratings in the high range (6–8) were based on comments such as a mother believing that her daughter feels inhibited because of the discrimination that she faces at school, a father who uses an article in the Spanish language newspaper *La Opinión* to back up his statement that discrimination is common, or a mother citing her own experiences of discrimination on her post office job. Ratings in the moderate range (3–5) are based on statements which include parents agreeing not to talk about discrimination in front of their children or stating that they believe that discrimination exists but they have not personally experienced it in their own lives. Ratings in the low range (0–2) are based on statements that, while discrimination may exist in the United States, it is not something that has been experienced either by parents or children and/or is not something that the parents report concern about.

Results

Parents' Aspirations and Expectations During the Elementary Years

Parents' educational aspirations and expectations for their children evince different starting points and different patterns over the course of elementary school. Table 2 reports these data, and Figure 1 illustrates them graphically. (Although we analyzed parents' aspirations and expectations separately, the two constructs are not independent: At kindergarten entry $r[81] = .32, p < .01$. The range over elementary school was $r = .11$ to a high of $r = .37$, with a mean correlation of $r = .27$.)

Table 2
Frequency of Parent Aspirations and Expectations for Their Children's Education

Variable	"No sé"	Less than high school	Trade school/ high school	Attend/finish university	Total
Fall kindergarten: 1989					
Aspirations	0.0%	4.9%	2.5%	92.6%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(0)	(4)	(2)	(75)	(81)
Expectations	6.2%	28.4%	6.2%	59.2%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(5)	(23)	(5)	(48)	(81)
Grade 1: fall 1990					
Aspirations	0.0%	6.3%	3.8%	89.9%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(0)	(5)	(3)	(71)	(79)
Expectations	12.3%	32.1%	6.2%	49.4%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(10)	(26)	(5)	(40)	(81)
Grade 2: fall 1991					
Aspirations	1.3%	6.3%	8.9%	83.5%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(1)	(5)	(7)	(66)	(79)
Expectations	24.7%	21.0%	9.9%	44.4%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(20)	(17)	(8)	(36)	(81)
Grade 3: fall 1992					
Aspirations	0.0%	6.2%	4.9%	88.9%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(0)	(5)	(4)	(72)	(81)
Expectations	25.9%	18.5%	4.9%	50.6%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(21)	(15)	(4)	(41)	(81)
Grade 4: fall 1993					
Aspirations	0.0%	4.9%	7.4%	87.7%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(0)	(4)	(6)	(71)	(81)
Expectations	11.1%	42.0%	12.3%	34.6%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(9)	(34)	(10)	(28)	(81)
Grade 5: fall 1994					
Aspirations	1.3%	7.7%	1.3%	89.7%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(1)	(6)	(1)	(70)	(78)
Expectations	23.5%	28.4%	9.9%	38.3%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(19)	(23)	(8)	(31)	(81)
Grade 6: fall 1995					
Aspirations	2.6%	5.3%	1.3%	90.8%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(2)	(4)	(1)	(69)	(76)
Expectations	18.4%	23.7%	9.2%	48.7%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	(14)	(18)	(7)	(37)	(76)

When children began school, parents had extremely high aspirations for their eventual attainment. More than 90% aspired to university attendance or completion. Moreover, parents were quite certain about their aspirations, and none said they were unsure. Over the course of elementary school, a high level of aspirations continued to be expressed consistently, with approximately 90% of the parents continuing to say they aspired to their child's

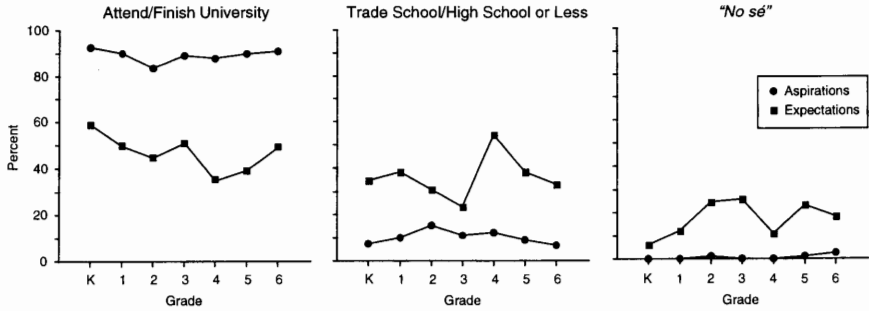


Figure 1. Parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's educational attainment, kindergarten to grade 6 (N = 81).

“attending or completing university” (except for grade 2, when 83.5% of parents aspired to their child's university attendance or completion). Uncertainty also remained low, and virtually all parents answered this question every year.

In contrast, expectations were not as high as aspirations, and they fluctuated across years. At the beginning of kindergarten, nearly 60% of parents expected their children to attend or complete university, and 6% said they did not know how far they expected their children to go on their formal schooling. (These results are similar to what Laosa [1982] reported for the differential between parents' aspirations and expectations for young Latino children.) Expectations then fluctuated considerably throughout elementary school, as did the number of parents expressing uncertainty over their children's future educational prospects (responding “no sé,” or “I don't know”). Using all time periods from kindergarten through beginning of sixth grade, repeated measures ANOVA were used to test for significant changes in aspirations and expectations over time. There were no significant differences across time in aspirations, but there was a significant difference ($p < .01$) for expectations. Pairwise comparisons indicated a significant year-to-year difference from beginning of third grade to beginning fourth grade, during which expectations significantly declined.

In sum, parents' educational aspirations are stable, high, and certain over elementary school, reflecting a consistent desire that children attain high levels of formal schooling. Expectations, however, are lower, less stable, and subject to considerably more uncertainty during the elementary years.

Although an extremely small number of parents responded “no sé” (“I don't know”) to the aspirations question, many more parents (from 6% to 26% over the years) gave this answer when asked to state an expectation for their children's eventual school attainment. To determine if there was a pattern to the *no sé* answers, responses were recoded 0 = *no sé*, 1 = *one of the expectations* (finish high school, attend trade school, etc.). Regression analy-

ses were conducted using "a stated expectation" versus "*no sé*" as the dependent variable, and family demographic variables, all cross-sectional and preceding expectations, achievement test scores, and teacher ratings measures as predictors. Nothing predicted the variance of the dichotomous variable, even taking into account the restricted range. Those who said "*no sé*" did so randomly, at least in terms of the demographic, expectation, or school performance data.

Finding no satisfactory explanation using our statistical data, we turned to the case materials to determine what might account for the reluctance on the part of some parents to state explicit expectations for attainment (i.e., *no sé* answers). The case study materials suggested that the *no sé* response to the expectations question might actually be, in part, a function of parents' very high aspirations for their children. High aspirations—parents' hopes and dreams for how well their children will do in school and in life—were often accompanied by the belief that, whatever one may desire for one's child, the children themselves ultimately make the choice about the road their lives will take. One mother explained, for example, "*Aunque uno quiere que estudien, ellos tienen que decidir. Va a ser ella que decide.*" ("Although one wants them to study, they have to decide. She'll be the one to decide" # 92/7; case # /page of final fieldnote.) Another mother compared her dreams for her son to attend the university to the plans that the family had made for her daughter's 15th birthday party: "*Uno hace ilusión, como con ella. Nos dejó preparados para hacer su fiesta de 15 años y se fue con el muchacho. Se fue y no hicimos nada. Uno puede decir, pero que lleguen a hacer lo que uno dice, ¿quién sabe?*" ("One has a dream, like with her. She left us prepared to have her 15th birthday party and she went off with the boy. She left and we didn't do anything. One can say something, but that they will do what one says, who knows?" # 114/11.)

For a substantial number of parents, therefore, the very real desire for a high level of study might actually contribute to the uncertainty about whether this dream or aspiration will be attained. (For a more complete examination of parents' future orientations for their children, an "emic" categorization of these orientations, and a fuller analysis of factors associated with them, see Reese, Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Balzano, 1995). Regardless of the source of uncertainty, however, the fact remains that the parents who said they did not know what would be their child's highest level of schooling also (by definition) did not state they expected their child to attend college. Thus, for the further analyses reported below, we converted expectations into a dichotomous variable: If parents said they expected their child to attend or complete university, they were scored a "1" for high expectation; all other answers, including "*no sé*," were coded as "0," meaning the parents did not state an expectation for college attainment. In this coding scheme, we include the "*no sé*" responses in a broader category defined as those "not stating college/university" as an expectation for their child's future educational attainment.

Parents' Aspirations and Expectations and Their Relationship to Student Achievement

In this study, we are interested in two basic questions: First, what is the relationship of parent aspirations and expectations to student achievement? Second, are aspirations and expectations associated with parents' exposure to U.S. society?

Table 3 reports correlations between parents' aspirations and expectations on the one hand and measures of children's achievement on the other. In kindergarten, there was no relationship between children's school performance (as measured by teacher ratings or test performance) and parents' educational aspirations and expectations for their children. Parents' aspirations continue (except in first grade) to be unrelated to any measure of children's performance throughout elementary school. However, child performance at the end of first grade significantly predicted parents' *expectations* the following fall (the beginning of second grade). This pattern of student performance predicting parents' expectations is repeated in second, fourth, and fifth grades: Teacher ratings in second and fifth grades (ratings were not collected in fourth grade), reading and math scores in fourth grade, and math scores in fifth grade all predicted parents' expectations the following fall.

In sum, although children's achievement and parents' expectations began as unrelated in kindergarten, over the course of the elementary grades parents' expectations become increasingly linked to how well children are doing in school. This association is in strong contrast to aspirations, which appear almost entirely independent of student achievement. Parents *aspire* to high levels of formal schooling, no matter how their children are doing academically. Parents *expect* more or less formal schooling, and this expectation is somehow related to how well their child is performing in school.

Parents' Aspirations and Expectations and Exposure to U.S. Society

Because parents indicated substantial variability in length of U.S. residence (for 81 mothers, mean years = 9.9; $SD = 5.4$; range = 1–27; for 77 fathers, mean years = 11.7; $SD = 5.1$; range = 1–21), we could test the hypotheses that the longer they had been in this country, the lower their aspirations and expectations for children's educational attainment would be, and the less likely would they be to consider formal schooling a viable means of social and economic mobility. We found no evidence to support either proposition at any grade level—from prekindergarten to grade 6—between years in the United States and expectations (coded 1, 0; see above explanation) for the larger N of 81. Using only those cases that stated an expectation, we also found no correlation between expectations and years in the United States. In addition, there was no correlation between parents' educational aspirations and the average number of mothers' and fathers' years in United States.

Table 3

Cross-sectional Correlations Between Children's School Performance and Parent Aspirations and Expectations for Their Children's Education

Child performance measures ^a	Aspirations ^b	Expectations ^c
Fall kindergarten: 1989		
Teacher ratings of child	.08	.08
Entering kindergarten literacy test	.13	.09
Kindergarten: 1990		
Teacher ratings of child	-.001	.04
Kindergarten literacy test	-.06	.16
Grade 1: 1991		
Teacher ratings of child	.29**	.27*
Reading achievement	.05	.08
Mathematics achievement	.15	.15
Grade 2: 1992		
Teacher ratings of child	.01	.37**
Reading achievement	-.01	.10
Mathematics achievement	-.03	.17
Grade 3: 1993		
Teacher ratings of child	.10	.12
Reading achievement	.12	.15
Mathematics achievement	-.05	.06
Grade 4: 1994		
Teacher ratings of child	N/A ^f	N/A ^f
Reading achievement ^d	-.04	.31**
Mathematics achievement ^d	.02	.27*
Grade 5: 1995		
Teacher ratings of child	.16	.38**
Reading achievement ^e	.07	.17
Mathematics achievement ^e	.01	.22

^aChild performance measures were collected in the spring of each grade and parent reports of aspirations and expectations were collected at the beginning of the next grade.

^bParent aspirations coded on a scale from 1 = *finish elementary school* to 6 = *finish university*.

^cParent expectations coded 0 = "no sé" or low educational expectations including finishing elementary, secondary, high school, or trade school; 1 = *high expectations* including attending or finishing university.

^dN = 79 for 1994 reading and mathematics achievement.

^eN = 68 for 1995 reading and mathematics achievement.

^fN/A = 4th grade teacher rating not available due to break in funding.

p* < .05, *p* < .01.

The direct assessment of recent discrimination experiences obtained in the spring of the child's fifth grade year (Ecocultural Family Interview) indicated only 8% of parents reporting discrimination was a significant factor affecting the family or children. Ninety-two percent of responses indicated discrimination was not a dominant theme nor that their children's experi-

encing discrimination was a major concern (20% of responses indicated "moderate" concerns regarding discrimination, and 72% of responses were rated as "low" in experiences with or concern regarding discrimination). Parent reports of discrimination were unrelated to years in the United States ($r = -.11$) or years parents were educated in U.S. schools ($r = .04$ and $r = .01$ for mothers and fathers, respectively). Nor were reports of discrimination related to parent expectations.

The expectations-driven model for Latino families described earlier predicts that the longer immigrant families are in the United States and the longer they are exposed to discrimination and inequality within the U.S. society, the greater will be their discontent with and lack of confidence in the system of public education as a means for obtaining a better future for their children. To test the relationship between time in the United States and confidence in the instrumental value of the educational system, we asked parents both forced-answer ratings questions as well as more open-ended questions in semistructured interviews with case study families.

At their child's entry into kindergarten, almost all parents expressed a belief that doing well in school increases the likelihood of children's getting a good job and making more money; somewhat less so, parents saw educational attainment as linked to future happiness and satisfaction in life. Nearly 90% (88.9%) of the parents responded 6 or 7 on scale of 1–7 (75.3% answered 7 or *definitely agree*) when asked whether they thought if their child did well in school he or she would be more likely to get a good job; 79% answered 6 or 7 (58% answered 7) when asked whether doing well in school would help their child make more money. Parents thought doing well in school would produce desired outcomes both for children in general and for their own child specifically. There was no support for the contention that the longer parents were in the United States, the less instrumental they thought formal education was. If anything, correlations between instrumentality and years in the United States were in the opposite direction: Three items ("In general, doing well in school will lead to a good job", "If my child does well in school, it will lead to a good job", and "If my child does well in school s/he will be happier in life") were significantly ($r = .24, p < .05$; $r = .30, p < .01$; and $r = .24, p < .05$, respectively) related to number of years in the United States. Other items were positively but not significantly associated with years in the United States.

By the end of grade three, when parents were asked the questions again, they continued to express high levels of support for these views: 90.7 responded 6 or 7 (81.3% answered 7) when asked whether they thought if a child did well in school he or she would be more likely to get a good job; 87.5% answered 6 or 7 (71.9% answered 7) when asked whether doing well in school would help a child make more money. Notably, the percentages were even higher when asked if they believed that these statements would hold true for their own children. Therefore, we found no support for the contention that parents were beginning to lose faith in the value of formal schooling for their children's future economic and occupational advance-

ment. In third grade there was no correlation between instrumentality of school and parents' years in the United States.

The Basis for Parents' Educational Aspirations for Their Children

As has been reported earlier (Delgado-Gaitan, & Trueba, 1991; Goldenberg, 1987; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Reese, Balzano, et al., 1995; Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) and shown above, immigrant Latino parents see formal schooling as a positive benefit for their children, and they aspire for their children to attain the highest levels possible. Parents not only see schooling as conducive to social and economic mobility, but also value formal education as a means of personal fulfillment.

Case study data reveal repeated references to the importance that parents attach to children's formal educational attainment. For example, one mother reported telling her son, "*Tú tienes que estudiar.*" *She explains: "Así va entendiendo que si él estudia va a andar con corbata y a trabajar en una oficina, y no limpiando carros."* ("You have to study" . . . That way he starts understanding that if he studies he'll wear a tie and work in an office and not washing cars" # 93/19.) Another father reports using himself as an example for his children: "*Sé la importancia de quedarse en la escuela. Sé lo difícil que es mantenerse sin tener los estudios.*" ("I know the importance of staying in school. I know how difficult it is to support yourself without study" # 64/9.) Another mother echoes these sentiments, "*Si una persona está preparada se abren las puertas fácilmente. Las personas que no estamos preparados nos consolamos con lo que nos den.*" ("If a person is educated doors open for him easily. Those of us who aren't educated have to console ourselves with what they give us" # 2/9.) One parent states simply, "*La gente más preparada tendrá que tener los mejores trabajos.*" ("More highly prepared [schooled] people will have better jobs" # 112/11.) Many parents were very explicit about the connection between formal schooling and social and economic status: "*Se necesitan estudios para obtener un buen trabajo, de otra manera no se puede.*" ("One needs studies in order to get a good job, otherwise you can't" # 92/12.) The case studies also revealed that parents were not simply interested in formal schooling for social and economic benefit; many cited personal development and satisfaction as another benefit. "*Yo pienso que el estudio es para tener una seguridad en uno mismo,*" states one mother. ("I think that study is in order to feel sure of oneself" # 77/20.) Another describes the difference that study has made in her life, "*Una persona estudiada hasta para responder responde mejor. Por ejemplo, yo no estudié mucho, pero estudié más que mi esposo y siento, aquí en el hogar, yo soy la que organiza las cosas.*" ("A person with study is able to respond better. For example, I didn't study a lot, but I studied more than my husband and I feel that, here in the home, I'm the one who organizes things" # 78/16.) Parents also see formal schooling as intertwined with their child's moral development, which they value at least as much as their child's social and economic mobility. For example, a mother in a family in which religion

plays a key role in shaping family activities and attitudes states that "*Si estudian tienen menos posibilidades de caer bajo la influencia del Diablo, representado en las malas compañías.*" (If they study, they will have fewer possibilities of falling under the influence of the devil, as represented by bad friendships" # 93/21.) Another mother reinforces the moral aspect of study, stating that for her husband, "*Lo que más le interesa es que salga una niña buena, estudiosa. Que no dé el mal paso por ahí.*" ("What he's most interested in is that she turns out to be a good girl, a studious girl. That she doesn't make a misstep anywhere" # 79/18.)

Formal education, for both occupational advancement and personal growth, receives such uniform endorsement among families in our sample that we have identified it as a cultural schema or model of how the world is perceived to work (Reese, Balzano, et al., 1995). Regardless of years in the United States, parents see a strong positive value to formal schooling, and they want their children to get as much of it as possible. This appears to explain their high, consistent, and certain aspirations throughout children's elementary years. It is also probable that the *estudios* schema and high educational aspirations are related to the relatively low levels of reported discrimination and concern about potential discrimination for one's children reported above. In one of the home interviews with case study families ($n = 25$) during year 3 of the study, the issues of discrimination, differential treatment of minorities, and job and educational status were treated at length. In these interviews, all but two of the families stated that discrimination is a fact of life in the United States, but they differed in their interpretations of how and why discrimination manifests itself. One-third of the case study parents (36%) claimed that they had personally experienced discrimination. More than half of the parents stated that Latinos often occupy low-level jobs because of discrimination based on lack of English proficiency and low levels of formal schooling. They therefore believed that the potential effects of discrimination will be diminished for their children because they will have an American education. One father compared his situation to that of his children, "*Hay mucha diferencia. Tienen con que responder. Viene de los estudios que están agarrando.*" ("There's a big difference. They'll be able to respond (fight back). It comes from the study that they're getting" # 2/10.) Another mother said that her husband had experienced discrimination, but she added, "*Y también no hay estudio. No trata de aprender. Tiene muchos años aquí y no trata de agarrar el inglés.*" ("And also there's no education. He doesn't try to learn. He's been here for many years and he doesn't try to learn English" # 78/21.) For that reason, she stated that she was not concerned that her children will experience discrimination; they will have an education and they will speak English.

Parents' Educational Expectations and Children's Achievement: A Causal Analysis

In this final set of analyses, we return to the direction-of-effects questions posed at the beginning of the paper: Do expectations lead to achievement or

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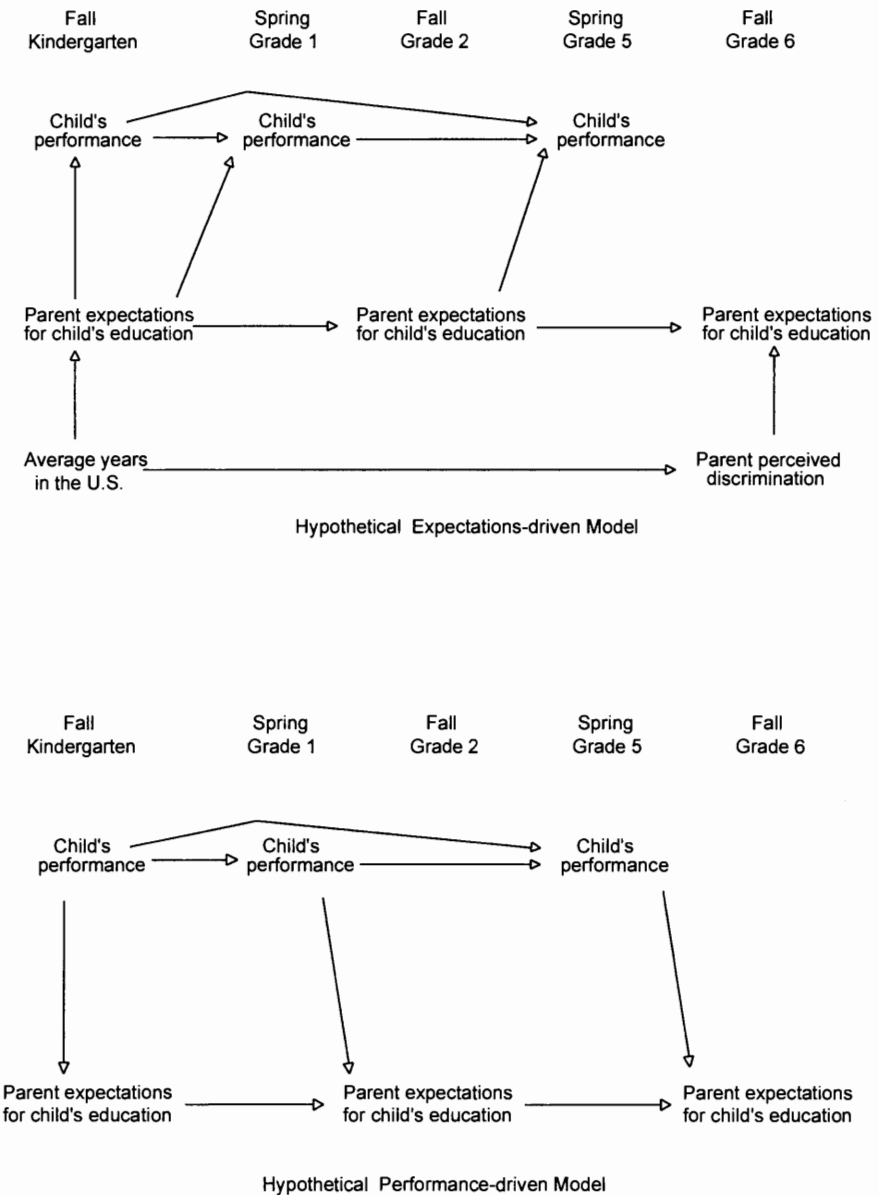


Figure 2. Hypothetical performance-driven and expectations-driven models of parent expectations and children's performance from pre-kindergarten to grade 6.

are expectations a reflection of children's achievement? Moreover, does parents' exposure to U.S. society play a role in children's achievement and in

the formation of parents' expectations for children's eventual school attainment?

Figure 2 presents two hypothesized models, expectations-driven and performance-driven, that we tested in order to answer these questions. In the expectations-driven model, the hypothesized paths are direct from parent expectations for child's education to child performance, and indirect from parents' years in the United States and perceived discrimination through parent expectations to child's performance. In the performance-driven model, the hypothesized paths are direct from child performance to parent expectations. The models reflect a longitudinal sequence in which early measures of parent-years living in the United States, parent expectations, and child performance predict later parent expectations and child performance measures.

The two competing models were tested using path analysis with EQS (Bentler, 1995). Three test statistics were used to evaluate the fit or adequacy of the models: chi-square statistic, the probability value for the chi-square statistic, and the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990). The parameter estimates were derived from the standardized solution. Fit of the models was assessed with the CFI and chi-square/degrees of freedom ratios. A CFI greater than .90 and a chi-square/*df* ratio of 2:1 are considered optimum.

A small amount of missing data was imputed for children's achievement from five remaining available parallel measures of achievement. Cases missing data for more than 1 year were excluded from these analyses. No data were missing for parent expectations. However, there was a small percentage of "no *sé*" responses to the question about expectations for children's education. For these cases, we imputed data from the six available parallel measures. The final sample size for the path analyses was $N = 57$.

Correlations between parent and child measures used in the path analyses are presented in Table 4. A summary of the fit indices resulting from the path analyses are presented in Table 5.

The results show that the performance-driven model fits the data for all measures of children's performance: Teacher ratings, parent ratings of child's school interest and academic progress, and reading and mathematics achievement. These models are presented in Figures 3 and 4 using standardized path coefficients for four of the five school performance indicators (excluding math for the sake of economy because the results are similar to reading).

Consistent with our hypotheses, the performance-driven models depicted in Figures 3 and 4 confirmed a relationship between children's performance and parents' expectations for their children's education that increased over time. By grades 4/5, these relationships reached significance for each child performance measure with the exception of mathematics achievement. Similar to the other child performance measures, the relationship between parent expectations and mathematics achievement also increased over time, the standardized path coefficients increasing from .00 before kindergarten to .12 in grade 1 to .16 in grade 5. In contrast to the other

Correlations Between Family and Child Measures in Path Analyses ($N = 57$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Fall kindergarten: 1989																				
1. Average of parents' years in the United States	1.00																			
2. Perceived discrimination	-.29*	1.00																		
3. Parent expectations	.03	-.21	1.00																	
4. Literacy test	-.05	.05	.03	1.00																
5. Teacher ratings	-.03	.07	.15	.50**	1.00															
6. School interest	.07	.07	.28*	.13	.10	1.00														
7. Academic progress	.26*	-.30*	.22	.13	.10	.23	1.00													
Grade 1: 1990-1991																				
8. Teacher ratings: Grade 1	-.10	.24	.24	.59**	.56**	.38**	.03	1.00												
9. Reading achievement: Grade 1	-.19	.27*	.03	.35**	.54**	.00	-.12	.50**	1.00											
10. Mathematics achievement: Grade 1	-.12	.08	.05	.46**	.57**	-.09	.09	.43**	.63**	1.00										
11. Academic progress: Grade 1	-.31*	.26*	.05	.39**	.27*	-.05	.07	.33*	.35**	.28*	1.00									
Grade 2: 1991-1992																				
12. Parent expectations: Grade 2	-.04	.12	.43**	.11	.23	.36**	.18	.43**	.25	.14	.03	1.00								
13. School interest: Grade 2	.03	.02	.25	.09	-.15	.19	.03	.28**	.08	-.04	.26*	.27*	1.00							
Grade 4: 1993-1994																				
14. Reading achievement: Grade 4*	.12	.04	-.03	.50**	.46**	.10	.12	.56**	.42**	.45**	.31*	.22	.05	1.00						
15. Mathematics achievement: Grade 4*	.13	.01	.11	.66**	.63**	.09	.15	.67**	.43**	.58**	.31*	.25	.20	.71**	1.00					
Grade 5: 1994-1995																				
16. Parent expectations: Grade 5	.31*	.06	.19	.11	.12	.33**	.23	.30**	-.10	.11	.04	.33*	.09	.29*	.23	1.00				
17. Teacher ratings: Grade 5	.00	-.01	.14	.55**	.47**	.18	.16	.62**	.42**	.55**	.33**	.37**	.20*	.66**	.76**	.22	1.00			
18. Academic progress: Grade 5	.02	.10	-.01	.51**	.31*	.31*	.14	.39**	.22	.23	.23	.25	.16	.33**	.50**	.22	.64**	1.00		
Grade 6: 1995-1996																				
19. Parent expectations: Grade 6	-.04	.19	.15	.27*	.00	.37**	-.02	.37**	.11	.07	.01	.34**	.20	.23	.28*	.27*	.45**	.55**	1.00	
20. School interest: Grade 6	-.03	.08	-.06	.14	-.02	.23	.00	.14	.08	.07	.20	.03	.24	.11	.27*	.19	.25	.46**	.36**	1.00

* $N = 56$ for all correlations with grade 4 reading and mathematics achievement.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 5
Fit Indices for Path Models (N = 57)

Model	Child measures	Chi-square	<i>p</i>	CFI
Expectations-driven	Teacher ratings of child	40.08	.001	.76
	Reading achievement	17.95	.08	.86
	Mathematics achievement	9.16	.61	1.00
	Child school interest	30.36	.02	.70
	Child academic progress	51.51	.001	.42
Performance-driven	Teacher ratings of child	11.47	.12	.95
	Reading achievement	9.01	.25	.96
	Mathematics achievement	3.88	.79	1.00
	Child school interest	10.42	.17	.90
	Child academic progress	9.60	.21	.93

performance measures, however, none of the paths for mathematics achievement was significant.

Comparisons of the performance-driven models revealed two patterns of change in the relationship between expectations and children's performance. Parent ratings of their children's school interest and academic progress significantly predicted their expectations prior to kindergarten, while teacher ratings and reading achievement did not begin to predict expectations significantly until the end of grade 1. This suggests that parent perceptions of their child's academic achievement and interest form part of the basis for their educational expectations from the beginning of school. They report observation of how well and with what level of enthusiasm their children do their homework and informal conversations with teachers as the major sources of information about how their children are doing in school in the primary grades. As the children progress through school, actual school performance as measured by standardized tests and reflected in teacher grades becomes increasingly available and comprehensible to the parents.

The expectations-driven model fit the data for predicting children's reading and mathematics achievement measures. However, there were no significant paths *from parent expectations to children's achievement*. Figure 5 illustrates the expectations-driven model for children's reading achievement. (The results for reading and mathematics achievement are similar, so only reading is presented.) The significant paths in these models are those indicating stability across children's achievement over time, stability across parent expectations over time, and a *positive* association (for this subsample of 57 cases with complete or nearly complete data) between parents' average years in the United States and expectations for children's educational attainment when the child is in grade 5. Parent expectations did not predict children's achievement in reading nor mathematics at any grade level.

In these expectations-driven models, the parents' average number of years in the United States predicted parental expectations for children in

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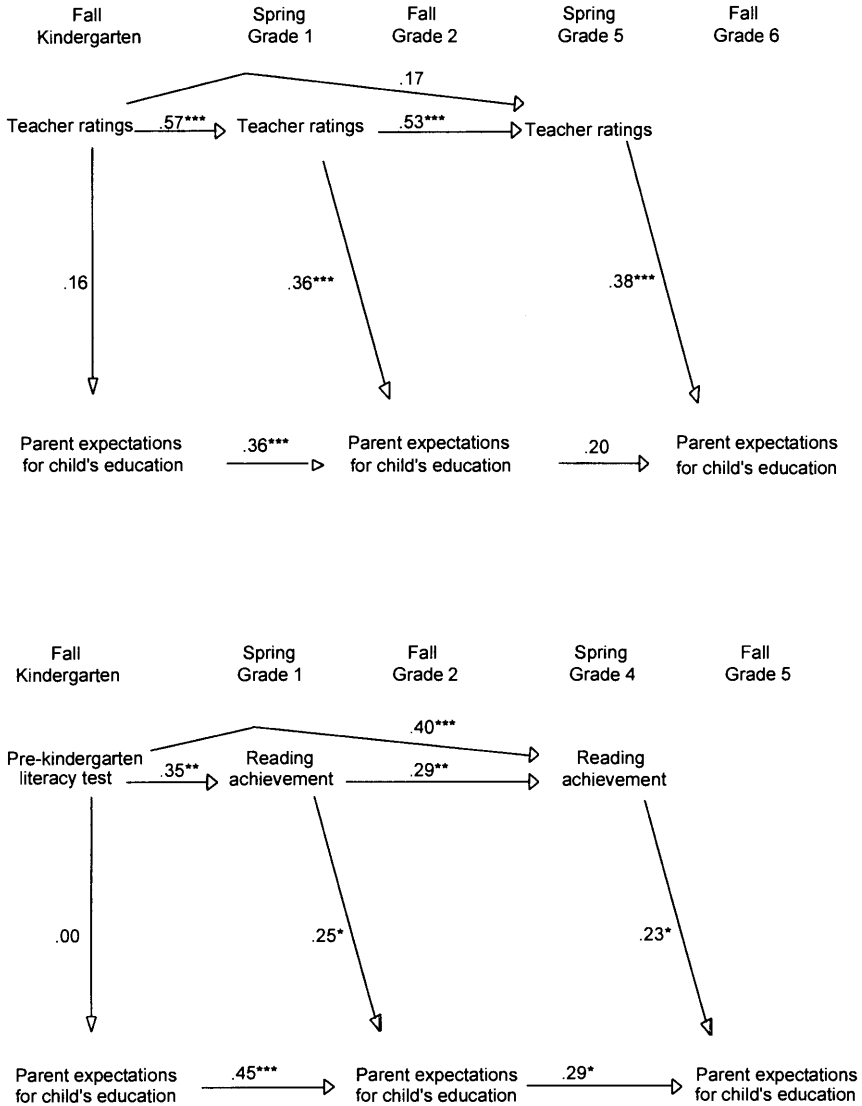


Figure 3. Performance-driven models of parent expectations and teacher ratings of child from grades 1 to 5 (chi-square [7, N = 57] = 11.47, $p = .12$, CFI = .95), and parent expectations and reading achievement from grades 1 to 4 (chi-square [7, N = 56] = 9.01, $p = .25$, CFI = .96). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .001$.**

grade 5, although not in prekindergarten. Contrary to the expected effect hypothesized in the expectations-driven model, we found that greater ex-

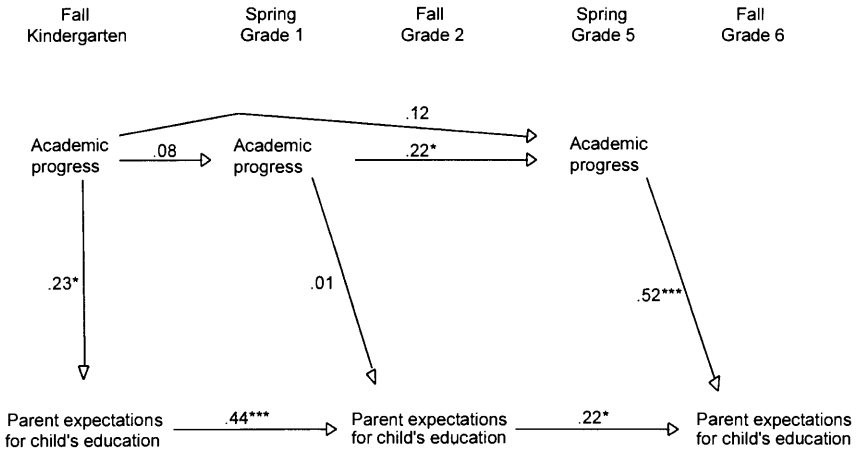
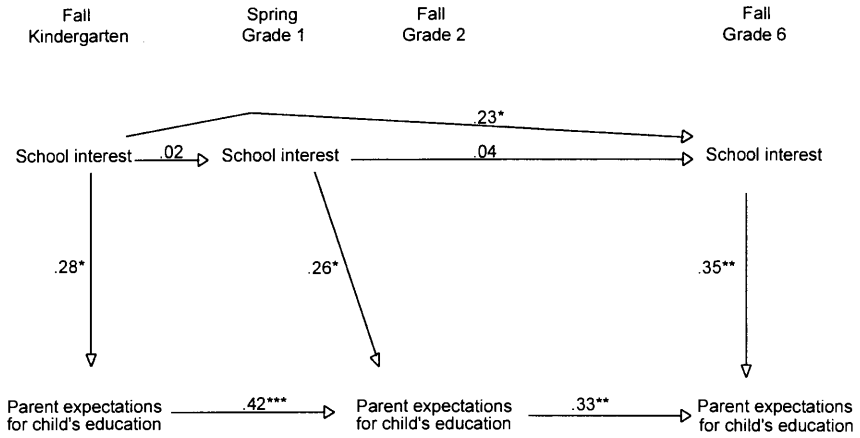


Figure 4. Performance-driven models of parent expectations and perceptions of child's school interest (chi-square [7, $N = 57$] = 10.42, $p = .17$, CFI = .90), and parent expectations and perceptions of child's academic progress (chi-square [7, $N = 57$] = 9.60, $p = .21$, CFI = .93) from prekindergarten to grade 5. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

posure to U.S. society/more years in the United States predicted *higher* expectations for children's education.

Latino Parents' Aspirations/Expectations and Children's School Performance

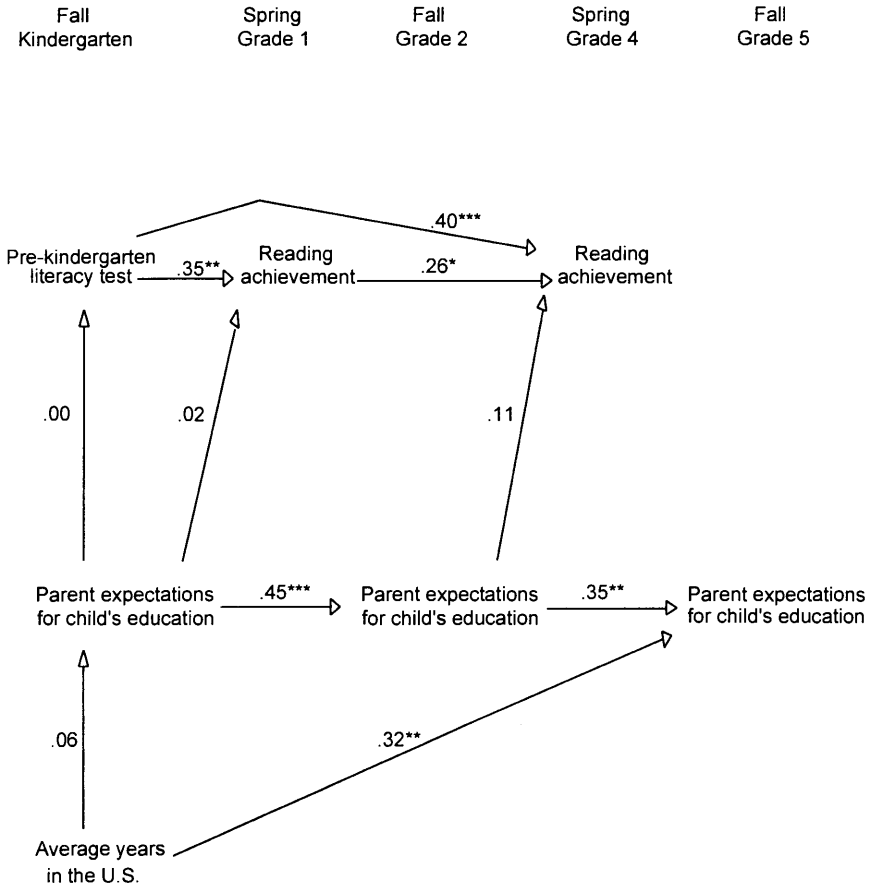


Figure 5. Expectations-driven model of parent expectations and reading achievement from grades 1 to 4 (chi-square [7, N = 56] = 17.95, p = .08, CFI = .86). *p < .05, **p < .01, *p < .001.**

The basis for parents' expectations: Confirmation from qualitative data. The open-ended interviews carried out with case study families allowed us to explore with the parents why they held certain expectations and how these expectations changed over time. As the above discussion suggests, parents made occasional references to their child's school *performance or achievement* in explaining their expectations. Some parents made explicit references to how children were doing academically as a basis for their expectation. For example, Adrian had started poorly in kindergarten, when his mother stated that she felt that it would only be with a great deal of effort that she would get him to finish high school. During first grade, however, she saw improvement and changed her expectation, "*Abora que veo que está mejor pienso que si puede terminar la universidad.*" ("Now that

I see that he is doing better I think that he can finish the university" # 114/9.) Similarly, Teresa's mother said when her daughter was in first grade, "*Teresa va a tener éxito en la escuela más adelante. El que bien empieza bien acaba.*" ("Teresa will be successful in school later on. One who starts well ends well" # 112/9.) Teresa's mother had originally predicted her daughter would only graduate high school; by first grade, she was expecting university completion.

Other parents made statements linking their expectations with their child's *interest* in school. For example, María's mother thought her kindergarten-aged daughter would do very well in school because "*Está muy interesada en la escuela. Le gusta.*" ("She's very interested in school. She likes it." # 111/K5) Enrique's mother adjusted her expectations from finishing high school (beginning of first grade) to finishing elementary school (beginning of second grade) "*como no le gusta la escuela.*" ("since he doesn't like school" # 91). And Edi's mother felt that he would reach her aspiration of finishing the university "*si sigue con el mismo entusiasmo*" (if he continues with the same enthusiasm" # 3).

In many cases it was difficult to disentangle parents' assessment of their children's performance as gauged by actual *learning and achievement* from children's performance as gauged by *motivation and interest*. Their comments indicated that they saw both as part of the same construct, or at least very closely linked. In Enrique's case, for example, Enrique was not doing very well in school, and his mother's comments indicated she was aware of his level of performance: "*No está bien. En matemáticas no sabe nada.*" Then she added, "*No quiere poner interés en las matemáticas.*" ("He's not doing well. In math he doesn't know anything. He doesn't want to show any interest in math" # 91/6.) Similarly, when asked about a decline in his son's performance (evidenced in a decline in teacher ratings over 3 years), Carlos' father did not talk about his achievement but rather about his interest in school. "*Desde el año pasado hemos visto que ha perdido el interés que tenía y hemos tratado de mil maneras de despertarlo.*" ("Since last year we have seen that he's lost the interest that he had and we've tried a thousand different ways of awakening it" # 64/4.) And when Leticia compared her son's fifth grade progress with the previous year's progress she said, "*Le fue más bien que el año pasado. Yo lo vi más motivado al ir a la escuela y llegaba y hacía su tarea.*" ("It went better for him than last year. I saw that he was more motivated about going and he came home and did his homework" # 32/7/1.).

It might be, then, that when parents talk about the child's interest in school, they are in fact referring to a cluster of behaviors and inclinations that includes actual performance as well as interest and motivation. This would be consistent with findings reported by Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) that Mexican immigrant parents were more likely to cite child interest in school as a performance indicator rather than grades or test scores. Indeed, we have evidence that this is so. In the spring of 1993 we asked all parents in the study the reasons for whatever expectations they stated (we asked the open-ended question *¿Por qué*

cree eso? "Why do you think that?"). Nearly two-fifths (36.8%) stated child interest, while only 18.8% gave as a reason child intelligence or academic performance. (Another 21% said parental help, and the rest gave some other reason.) In sum, our case data regarding the importance parents place on student interest as a performance indicator combined with the path analyses suggests that perceived child interest plays an important mediating role in the relationship of parent expectations and student achievement.

In addition to children's performance in school—whether gauged by achievement or interest—other factors influenced parents' assessments of children's future educational prospects. These included the influence of peers and what parents refer to as "*malas compañías*" ("bad company"), the economic resources available to the family, parents' own experiences with school and work, the support that parents are able to give their children with regard to schoolwork, and the school performance and experiences of older siblings and other relatives. These factors worked in different ways either to raise or lower expectations as children proceeded through school (see Reese, Gallimore, et al., 1995). Nevertheless, parents' perceptions of emerging patterns of school performance and achievement appeared to play a role in determining expectations for their children's eventual educational attainment.

Discussion and Conclusions

The improvement of educational outcomes for language minority youth in American schools continues to be a key challenge facing educators. A variety of factors have been nominated and investigated as contributing to the disproportionate underachievement of many ethnic and racial minority groups in our schools, e.g., poverty; cultural and linguistic discontinuities between home and school; the hidden curriculum of the classroom that privileges Euro-American, middle-class experiences; discrimination; and low aspirations or expectations rooted in inequalities and discrimination. In this study, we focused exclusively on one set of factors, parents' educational aspirations and expectations for their children. Through a longitudinal analysis that permitted examination of the relationship between aspirations/expectations and school performance over time, we present data challenging the proposition that parents' low aspirations and expectations lead to lowered motivation and poor performance on the part of their children. To the contrary, we found high levels of parental aspirations throughout the study. We also found that expectations did not predict children's achievement; instead, over the course of elementary school, fluctuations in parental expectations were influenced by variations in children's performance.

We draw four primary conclusions from the data and analyses reported here.

First, *Latino immigrant parents want their children to pursue formal schooling beyond high school*. Our sample was nearly unanimous on this point throughout the elementary school years. Latino immigrant parents see success in formal schooling as important for their children's long-term per-

sonal, social, and economic outlook; this explains the overwhelmingly high numbers of parents who said they aspired to college educations for their children. Latino parents are not unique in this regard. As Knox, Lindsay, and Kolb (1993; cited in Kezar, 1997) note, "Nearly everyone in America, indeed the world over, believes in a powerful connection between education and occupational success" (Kezar, 1997, p. 5). Education is not only associated with occupational success. According to a recent review, it is also associated with more meaningful and satisfying work, greater happiness and satisfaction in life, more self-direction, and other indicators of personal well being (Kezar, 1997). Individuals can certainly lead productive and satisfying lives without many years of formal schooling, a fact acknowledged by parents in our study. Yet statistically, college education—even college attendance (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1996)—is associated with desirable personal outcomes. It is not surprising that the parents' ratings and interview answers reflected a strong belief that these associations would also hold true for their children; hence, their strong desires for their children to attend college.

Second, *time in the United States does not lead to more negative attitudes toward schooling and schooling's instrumental value*. If anything, we found the opposite. For some of our questions, the longer parents had been in the United States the more they expressed the belief that school success is associated with desirable outcomes for their children. And despite assertions by some that exposure to U.S. society has a deleterious effect on immigrants' educational outlook, we found either no correlation between years in the United States and educational expectations or, in late elementary school, a positive correlation: The longer parents had been in the United States, the more likely they were to expect college attendance for their child. However, our sample was limited to the immigrant generation. Length of stay in the United States might show a different pattern of educational aspirations and expectations for the children's generation. Then again, it might not. Rumbaut (1995) reported that length of residence in the United States and second generation status (that is, being born in the United States) were associated with lowered grade point average and aspirations. In contrast, Anderson & Johnson (1971) found little or no difference across three generations of Mexican American parents' emphasis on children's completing college. In our own study, interviews carried out with the participating second-generation children during their middle school years revealed high levels of endorsement of the same aspirations for eventual school attainment and for the *estudios* schema described earlier (Reese, Kroesen, & Gallimore, 1997). However, these children were still under the control and influence of their parents and had yet to enter high school. The immigrant generation parents, who were the focus of this study, were largely unfamiliar with American schools. Many referred to the United States as "*el país de las oportunidades*" (the land of opportunity). They expressed a strong belief in the popular meritocratic ideology of the United States, as is typical for voluntary immigrant groups. Although their faith in these opportunities remained strong, many were unsure of how to take advantage of the opportunities they

did encounter. They had high hopes for their children's eventual educational attainment but had little knowledge about what they could or should do to act on those aspirations. This lack of information is likely to have consequences for children's eventual attainment, because parents do not know, for example, about courses required for college entrance, the existence of different academic tracks leading to different educational opportunities, or the availability of funding and counseling to facilitate higher levels of formal schooling.

Their second-generation children, on the other hand, will have received all of their education in this country. As they continue through school and beyond, it is likely they will be better informed about available educational pathways in the United States. It is also possible that they will begin to exhibit the lowered educational expectations and values observed or postulated by Rumbaut, Suárez-Orozco, and others. One reason to expect a differentiated view of the value of education among this second generation is the highly variable nature of their own school experiences. Fully 50% had standardized reading scores below the 25th percentile at the end of elementary school. These children almost surely will look back on their schooling with a different perspective than the 5% of our sample who were above the 75th percentile at the end of elementary school. Such variable performance levels might well influence perceptions of their own opportunities and those of their children. Our continuing longitudinal study is tracking achievement and its relationship to parents' and students' own aspirations (and expectations) for this second generation of Latino youth.

An important question for future research is the interplay between student achievement and the students' own aspirations and expectations. In this study we focused exclusively on parents' aspirations and expectations, yet Latino children's future orientations might either be influenced by or influence their achievement (e.g., Stipek, 1993). It will be especially important to see whether perceptions of limited opportunities reported for Latino adolescent youth, which are inimical to high levels of academic achievement (e.g., Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986), are also observed for younger children and at what age they appear.

Third, *although aspirations are high and largely invariant, educational expectations are influenced by how well children do in school*. Expectations are indeed lower than aspirations, which is not difficult to understand: For all of us there is generally some discrepancy between what we want to happen and what we think, realistically, will happen. This discrepancy is probably even greater for the parents in our sample as they consider their hopes for children's educational futures. These parents are immigrant, Spanish-speaking, low-income, and generally without a family history of higher education, and they are painfully aware of the gap likely to exist between what they want and what they will be able to provide for their children. For many, expectations for their children's futures are surrounded by insecurity about their ability to shoulder the financial burden of higher education or about the ability of their children to withstand the influences of gangs, drugs, delinquency, and early pregnancy that permeate the neighborhoods where they

live. Nevertheless, amidst the many positive and negative factors that determine educational expectations, school performance (including the degree of interest the child seemed to exhibit in doing well in school) emerged as an influence early in the children's school careers.

Student achievement and parent expectations were unrelated when children began kindergarten, but an association emerged early in elementary school and continued throughout the subsequent years. Although many structural barriers or cultural factors might lead to diminished expectations—which in turn might lead to diminished outcomes—children's actual school performance and, perhaps even more important, children's apparent interest and school motivation, were factors influencing parents' perceptions of the likelihood their children would go on to college. Although our data on expectations and performance were obtained from an exclusively Latino sample, there is no reason to assume that the direction-of-effects observed in this population would not hold true for other populations as well. This is of course an issue for future research.

Fourth, and perhaps most important from the perspective of policy and practice, *children's achievement (at least through elementary school) is not constrained by parents' educational expectations or their aspirations*. This is an important finding, because educators often cite low parental expectations and aspirations as part of the explanation for the generally low educational performance of children of Latino immigrants. Parents (or lowered opportunity structures) then are blamed for low achievement. Our findings suggest that the logical and empirical bases for these beliefs must be seriously questioned. More to the point, low parental aspirations and expectations cannot be used by educators as an explanation or an excuse for children's low achievement levels.

Improving teaching, curriculum, and achievement are not simple nor trivial matters, as demonstrated by the long and difficult history surrounding school reform efforts (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1996). However, if Latino students' achievement is not constrained by the aspirations and expectations of parents who perceive structural inequalities, this suggests even more strongly the importance of interventions directly aimed at improving teaching and learning in school. Several recent efforts have demonstrated that direct intervention to improve teaching and learning in school have enhanced Latino children's achievement (see August & Hakuta, 1997), although none that we know have examined effects on parents' aspirations and expectations.

We emphasize that regardless of the relationships among perceived opportunities, educational aspirations/expectations, and children's achievement, vigorous struggle to eliminate structural inequalities must continue. Simple equity demands that students (and parents) be afforded equal educational and vocational opportunities—not just because it will contribute to improved student achievement, but because equal opportunities should be a right.

Implications for Educators, Community Workers, and Policymakers

When there has been no intervention with “effects” to be gauged, it is particularly risky to offer policy and practice recommendations resting only

on basic research. We hesitate to make speculative suggestions about what practitioners or policymakers should do. With this caveat, we offer the following for discussion and further consideration.

First and most fundamentally, educators and others who work with children of Latino immigrants should stop assuming that low levels of parental aspirations and expectations are part of the reason for children's low achievement levels. Grossman (1984) found that educators frequently assume that Latino parents are mired in a "culture of poverty" that prevents them from appreciating the value of education and encouraging their children to do well in school. However, the practical implications of our findings are clear: Educators must realize that immigrant Latino parents are not an impediment to their children's school success. On the contrary, they are valuable allies who can help promote their children's academic attainment.

Second, educators must make an increased effort to reach out to Latino parents and enlist them in collaborative efforts to improve students' achievement. Despite low levels of formal education, Latino parents are willing and able to provide important support for their children's school success, e.g., by making sure children complete assignments and put forth effort at home and at school. All of the evidence we have collected in this and related studies (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995) suggests that overall, parents monitor and follow through conscientiously when informed of their children's school assignments or of school difficulties children might be experiencing. Even if parents do not speak English and children are in English-based instruction, parents are still capable of providing important home-based support. If children are in Spanish-language programs, parents can provide even more support. But because many parents assume that the school is the primary arena for academic development (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995), educators must explicitly help parents link what they do to how well their children succeed in school.

Educators will sometimes take issue with the contention that parents are deeply interested in their children's education and cite as a counter-example such things as parents' taking their children out of school for family trips to Mexico or Central America. This practice might reflect the inevitable tensions that come from being in the precarious and difficult situations many Latino parents face living in the United States. It might also be, as teachers argue, detrimental to children's school achievement. In any event, here again teachers should attempt to connect with parents and help them provide academic learning opportunities for children while they are away. Given parents' great interest in their children's academic attainment, they are likely to respond positively and gratefully to specific suggestions and materials for children's continued study. We have seen overwhelming evidence of this (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995).

Finally, educators who care about the future educational attainment of the second generation—the children of immigrant Latino parents—must help families and children understand the prerequisites and pathways to higher education in this country. Many of the parents simply do not understand the U.S. educational system, even though they are firm in their desire that children obtain as much formal schooling as possible. Indeed, some of

the parents in the study seized the opportunity of participation in our project to ask us what they or their children need to do if the children are to reach college or university. We found widely variable understanding of the U.S. educational system among the parents, even at the level of interpreting grades and report card comments. We suspect that most of the families would benefit from clear information about how to interpret grades and other school communication, and from finding out what their children's college options are, what courses children should take in high school, and what grants, scholarships, or mentoring and advising might be available to help them. Our data suggest that immigrant parents would welcome outreach and informational programs by community colleges, colleges, and universities. K-12 educators and community workers in schools with Latino children should actively pursue partnerships and collaboratives with colleges and universities to provide parents and students with this information on a systematic and ongoing basis.

The path to high levels of academic achievement, including college attendance and beyond, can be complex and daunting (The Path to College, 1997). This is particularly true for students and families with low income levels, who are ethnic minorities, immigrants, and without a family history of participation in higher education. Many conditions must be met if a youngster is to be successful in school and have available a range of desirable post-secondary options. One thing is clear, however: Directly helping students be successful and feel motivated, from the moment they walk into preschool or kindergarten, will increase the chances of success in later years and of high expectations for continued school attainment.

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