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Perceptions and Resilience in Underrepresented Students' Pathways to College

by Lara Perez-Felkner — 2015

Background/Context: Schools have attempted to address stratification in black and Latino students' access to higher education through extensive reform initiatives, including those focused on social supports. A crucial focus has been missing from these efforts, essential to improving the effectiveness of support mechanisms and understanding why they have been insufficient: how students experience these reforms.

Purpose: How can the social context of schools keep underrepresented minority students on track to transition to college? This study investigates how students experience the social contexts of their schools in relation to their college ambitions, and the particular attributes of schools' social contexts that might positively affect their transition to four-year colleges.

Research Design: Using a mixed-methods case study design, this three-year study examined students' educational pathways in a Chicago charter high school. Data collection methods included ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and a longitudinal survey. Supplemental secondary data sources were utilized to contextualize the case study.

Analysis: Interview transcripts and field notes were transcribed and coded to examine variation in students' experience of their social context and their college transition plans. To contextualize these findings, the author utilized descriptive, associative, and logistic regression techniques to analyze quantitative data from the case study survey and corresponding city and national datasets.

Findings: The school's organization facilitated academic, social, and college preparatory support through structured relationships. Notwithstanding, there was notable within-school variation in students' transitions to college. Students in this urban charter school often experienced multiple obstacles that interfered with the college ambitions they generally shared with their families and school peers. School regard is a mechanism identified in this study as central to students' transition success. Students' perceptions of their teachers' and their peers' regard for their capacity for educational success was associated with their persistence through the transition to college in the face of academic, socioeconomic, and other challenges.

Conclusions/Recommendations: This study demonstrates the effort and engagement underrepresented students expend in the effort to become college-ready, and the risk for burnout as a result of both academic and nonacademic hardships during their high school years. School regard may mitigate these effects. Mere expectations for college appear insufficient in the current access-for-all climate. Rather, it is important that students perceive value and esteem for their potential from school faculty and peers, sustaining their ambitions through the obstacles they encounter in high school and expect in college.

While access to higher education has been increasing, African American and Latino youth continue to be underrepresented among both four-year college enrollees and degree recipients (National Science Foundation, 2010). Decades of previous research findings have shown that educational aspirations in high school promote future educational attainment (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969), even among populations that have not traditionally pursued postsecondary education (see Gandara, 2002; St. John 1991). Notably however, African American and Latino youth now hold similarly high college aspirations as their white and Asian peers. In 2002, 75% of high school sophomores from underrepresented minority groups aspired to earn a bachelor's degree or higher than their white and Asian peers. In 2002, 75% of high school sophomores from underrepresented minority groups aspired to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 1A). Nevertheless, racial-ethnic disparities in college access and persistence remain. In 2010, only 20% of African Americans and just 14% of Latinos (who were citizens or permanent residents) age 25 and older had completed four years of college (Figure 1b). These findings beg the question: What can schools do to help underrepresented youth realize their college aspirations?

Figure 1a. Underrepresented Minority H.S. Sophomores' Educational Expectations in 2002
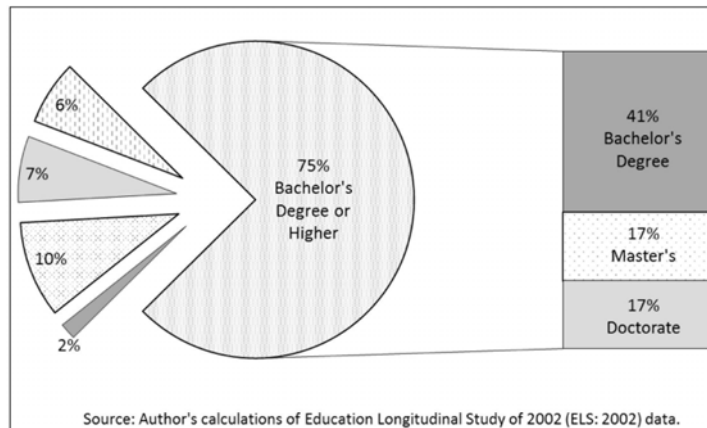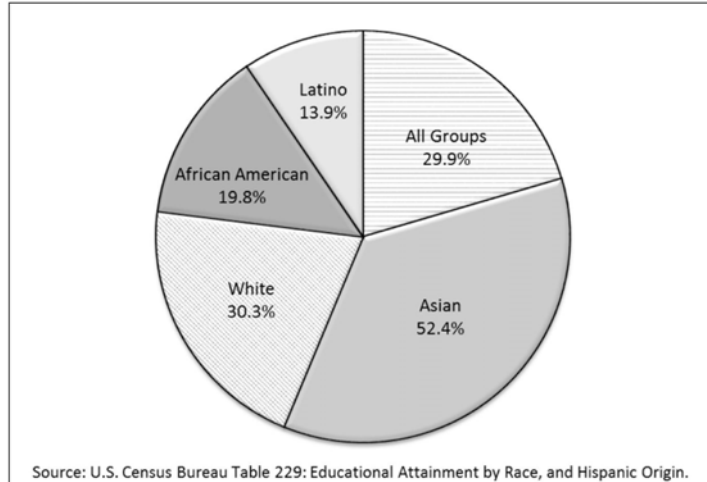

Source: Author's calculations of Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002) data.

Figure 1b. College Completion by Race-Ethnicity, 2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Table 229: Educational Attainment by Race, and Hispanic Origin.

Despite extensive and expensive reform initiatives addressing this stratification, underrepresented and low-income youth continue to encounter compounding academic, institutional, and personal challenges on their pathways to college (DeLuca & Rosenbaum, 2001; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Grodsky & Jackson, 2009; Hanson, 1994; Spenner, Buchmann, & Landerman, 2005).[1] To the surprise of some and the frustration of many,

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LARA PEREZ-FELKNER, PhD, is an assistant professor of Higher Education and Sociology in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. Her research examines how young people's social contexts influence their college and career outcomes. She focuses on the mechanisms that shape entry into and persistence in fields in which they have traditionally been underrepresented. In particular, she investigates racial-ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic disparities in post-secondary educational attainment and entry to scientific career fields. Presently, she is a co-Investigator on National Science Foundation grant #1232139, examining gendered differences in U.S. university students' persistence in engineering and computer science majors. Dr. Perez-Felkner's recent work includes solo- and lead-authored articles and chapters. Recent Publications include:

Perez-Felkner, L. (2013). Socialization in Childhood and Adolescence. In J. DeLamater and A. Ward (Eds.),

underrepresented youth confront these obstacles to matriculation even in schools designed specifically for college preparation, including high-achieving schools and schools of choice (e.g., private, magnet, and charter schools) (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Slaughter-Defoe & Johnson, 1988). On the academic front, they are less commonly encouraged to take advantage of the most rigorous course sequences and are often constrained in their ability to engage in college-relevant extracurricular activities (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Many of these academic and extracurricular opportunities involve careful planning early on in secondary school, which generates still further barriers for underrepresented youth who face disparities in sources and timing of information (Crosnoe, 2004; Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010; Ream, 2005).2 Social psychological experiences in school may hinder their readiness for the transition to college as well: In particular, they may experience and internalize negative stereotypes about their groups' academic potential (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Moreover, youth exercising school choice lose time commuting long distances to and from school (Wilson, Marshall, Wilson, & Krizek, 2010), potentially straining their engagement in school as well as their relationships with their families, who may face hardships of their own.

Some of these challenges are well recognized, and for many years, schools have provided support systems aimed at overcoming them. Numerous studies have examined how significant others seek to support youth by such means as mentoring, fostering positive expectations, and promoting academic engagement (e.g., Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Rockoff, 2004; Sewell et al., 1969). Teachers in particular can foster expectations that support low-achieving students' academic engagement and increase their motivation (Roderick & Engel, 2001). However, these supports have been insufficient to counter the problems that underrepresented students encounter, and further, these failings have not been adequately explained. To date, most studies of social support mechanisms have evaluated them intrinsically, assessing the supports independently of the students' experience of them. Yet the effectiveness of the supports depends crucially on just what is omitted: the students' experience. Underrepresented youth's experience of these supports is a crucial determinant of their efficacy.

This manuscript reports on a mixed-method case study of the pathways to college for students in a predominantly Latino and low-income urban charter school. Specifically, this article asks: How can the social context of schools keep underrepresented minority students on track to transition to college? To investigate this primary question, the manuscript examines two subquestions. First, how do high-aspiring underrepresented minority students interpret the obstacles before them in pursuing college ambitions? Second, what dimensions of students' social contexts appear to promote resilience on their path to college? Observing, interviewing, and surveying students and their teachers over a three-year period, the study finds that students' perceptions of school actors' regard for their potential— explained here as *school regard*— serves as a primary mechanism for the development of their resilience on the path to college.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools' social contexts can influence underrepresented youths' pathways from high school to college (Southworth & Mickelson, 2007). In high schools with lower minority participation in the higher academic tracks, Latino and African American students were found to earn lower grades and enroll in four-year colleges at lower rates (Muller, Riegle-Crumb, Schiller, Wilkinson, & Frank, 2010). Teacher-student relationships have been posited to contribute to these patterns. For example, teachers may fail to recognize minority students' academic abilities and reward their preschool behavior as highly as their white students (Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Ferguson, 2003). Unfortunately, many schools still tend to better prepare majority youth for the transition to college.

CONTINUED INEQUALITIES IN THE AGE OF ACCESS

Nationally, educational disparities persist both within and across schools. The schools attended by underrepresented minorities tend to offer fewer resources and supports than those attended by white students. These structural, academic, and social resources are more commonly available at schools organized around sending their students to college. Such schools have tended to be inaccessible to many underrepresented students, as the highest quality public schools tend to be located in affluent areas and private options tend to have a prohibitive price tag and a shrinking number of scholarships given the economic downturns of recent years.

New school choice options have produced varying rates of success for underrepresented students at local, state, and national levels (Perez-Felkner, Hedberg, & Schneider, 2011; Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Lavertu, Sass, & Witte, 2009). With this expanded landscape of school choices, many urban students have been redistributed, albeit problematically, into new types of public schools in which minority youth are transitioning to colleges at high rates. These environments present opportunities to examine within-school variation for high-aspiring underrepresented students in less traditionally studied social contexts, among co-ethnic and similarly socioeconomically disadvantaged peers.

Expanded access to higher education appears to have contributed to shrinking proportions of academic undermatching between the capacities of low-income and first generation college students and the postsecondary institutions they apply to and attend (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). Recent evidence shows however that while high-achieving low-income students continue to have high aspirations, they continue to pursue colleges and universities that are weaker and award less financial aid than those that more advantaged students attend (Hoxby & Avery, 2012). Further, underrepresented students tend to have fewer social and tangible resources in their college searches, and therefore employ more haphazard and less reliable strategies in their college pursuits (McDonough, 1997). These findings emphasize the importance of identifying mechanisms that help these ambitious and overlooked young people connect their aspirations to actual transitions to college.

One often-overlooked dimension of high-aspiring underrepresented students' college trajectories pertains to their response to setbacks. The high educational expectations now held by historically underrepresented students do not seem to be a phenomenon of big dreams and small effort (Domina, Conley, & Farkas, 2011a, 2011b). It continues to take hard work. More colleges now exist which will accept the tuition dollars of underprepared students, but these institutions have a weak track record for helping students realize their dreams of college degrees and professional careers (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013). Indeed, the opportunity gap remains, and with it the need for evidence-based approaches to look beyond achievement, honing in on how to better structure opportunities for underrepresented youth to have truly equal access to higher education (Carter & Welner, 2013).

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOLS

Beyond the family, one of the most important factors shaping adolescents' educational outcomes has been shown to be the social context of their schools (Hallinan, 2006). The social context of schools refers to the quality and nature of relationships among the actors within them, including teachers, students, and other school personnel (Ball, 2002; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1995). The relational nature of education enables actors within school organizations to communicate norms, expectations, and sanctions directed toward improving students' educational outcomes (Coleman, 1988). This social capital can be particularly effective when aligned with a specific goal such as college matriculation (Sandefur & Laumann, 1998). Students may be more likely to think that teachers and classmates expect them to reach their potential in schools with high levels of social trust, individuals' belief in the goodwill and competence of others, and the personal regard expressed through these relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Similarly, students' academic efficacy and expectations may be raised in the context of academic press, including rigorous school practices, strong pro-academic norms and high expectations for students (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982). Studies of academic press have tended to dismiss the role of in-school relationships in students' internalization of their academic potential however, when incorporating school community in their framing (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999; Shouse, 1996).

Adolescents' future educational attainment can also be influenced by significant others in their lives, such as their parents, relatives, teachers, and close friends (Sewell et al., 1969). Students reporting caring and supportive relationships with teachers may be more likely to remain academically engaged in response to challenges experienced in school (Klem & Connell, 2004). When teachers do not communicate personal investment and belief in students' potential however, students' motivation may decrease. For underrepresented minorities, this perceived lack of support can marginalize students and reinforce internalized stereotypes of their group's low achievement (Valenzuela, 1999). The school contexts in which these interactions are nested may affect how students interpret these school relationships as well as their academic opportunities.

Studies of schools' social contexts have been critiqued for treating school-wide conditions as being experienced similarly by all students in a school. Various aspects of these contexts have however been found to vary more widely within schools than between schools (Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003; Pallas, 1988; Plank, Bradshaw, & Young, 2009). Theories explaining how school contexts affect student outcomes risk serious errors when not accounting for how students— individually and collectively— experience the social context of schooling. This lens is particularly important in the study of how social contexts affect underrepresented students' educational outcomes.

FORMING PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many school reforms intend to improve students' real and perceived opportunity structures (e.g., Merseth, Cooper, Roberts, Tieken, Valant, & Wynne, 2009). Underrepresented minority students tend to interpret their opportunities based on their racial-ethnic and socioeconomic status (Avery & Kane, 2004). Research suggests youths' ambitions may be negatively affected when societal expectations for minority underachievement are coupled with teachers' low expectations (O'Connor, 1999; Taylor & Graham, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, students have been found to have lower test performance when negative stereotypes about their group are made salient, compared to those for whom negative stereotypes are not made salient (Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002).

These findings suggest the importance of the social psychological context of schooling, underscoring the significance of students' perceptions of whether or not they are being supported in their classrooms and school communities (Benner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2001). For example, perceived emotional support from teachers it is associated with better developmental outcomes during times of developmental stress, but it is notably less common in secondary school than in primary school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 229). Importantly, students' interpersonal experiences of their schools can influence their perceptions of opportunities for college and probable financial and social returns from attending university (Avery & Kane, 2004).

HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The influence of significant others' expectations of youth and their effects on educational outcomes may vary by the racial-ethnic group of the student and the type of "other"; it is therefore important to unpack how youth experience and interpret these signals (Simon & Starks, 2002). This article investigates underrepresented minority students' resilience in their pursuit of postsecondary educational attainment, reporting on a study that finds that students more readily realize their college goals when they perceive school-based others' investment in these ambitions. This study identifies the student-centered concept of school regard, which refers to students' perceptions school faculty and/or peers believe in their potential to realize their present and future educational aspirations. These perceptions become internalized to either further or hinder the realization of their ambitions, in particular when students encounter potential setbacks.

How these individual and collective belief structures develop within social institutions and relationships remains a puzzle. Bandura (1977) developed the concept of self-efficacy, the belief that individuals or groups have in their capacity to achieve a goal, which has been expanded to consider the efficacy of collectivities (e.g., Plank et al., 2009). Hoy and colleagues developed the concept of academic optimism as a response to the seminal finding that socioeconomic status outweighs school quality in regards to student achievement (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). Academic optimism is comprised of three organizational dimensions that have been found to influence student achievement after controlling for SES: the school's academic emphasis (similar to academic press); collective efficacy among school leadership and faculty; and teachers' social trust in parents and students (Hoy et al., 2006). These papers frame these dimensions as interacting, reinforcing elements of schools' social context. Although this ambitious conceptualization bears merit, particularly in the study of educational reform, the concept's focus on school leadership misses a critical dimension: how students experience these phenomena.

Underrepresented youth perceive their potential through multiple lenses, including their perceptions of how others regard them. Du Bois describes how African Americans measure themselves through the perspective of others in addition to their own perspective, developing a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). Some psychologists have used public ethnic regard to conceptualize youths' interpretation of how their ethnic identity group is viewed by society (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). Neither concept directly addresses the microlevel, relational mechanisms through which these global interpretations might develop.

The findings presented here suggest that school regard develops from individuals' interactions with others in the social context of their schools. Further distinguishing perceived school regard from other concepts is its focus not on individuals' ethnic identities but rather on their interpretations of their worth and potential for educational success. This manuscript explains the particular challenges underrepresented students encounter, and looks from their eyes at how teachers, peers, and other school actors do and do not help build resilience when they encounter these obstacles. In developing from these examinations the concept of school regard, this manuscript offers insights to schools and families to help their students overcome the obstacles that threaten to defer underrepresented young people's college dreams.

METHODLOGY

ANALYTIC DESIGN

This manuscript is primarily concerned with identifying the attributes of schools' social contexts that might enhance transitions to four-year colleges for underrepresented minority students with similar backgrounds. Recognizing that low-income underrepresented youth are insufficiently studied as agentic individuals, this analysis begins with an examination of their conceptions of the hurdles in front of them. Next, the focus turns to the degree to which students' perceptions of their social contexts helps them overcome these obstacles. The paper closes with theoretical and policy implications.

DATA AND SAMPLE

This investigation of underrepresented students' transitions from high school to college employs two complementary research designs. The study uses original data derived from a mixed-methods case study of students' educational pathways in Santiago, a charter high school in a Chicago, a city with heavy investment in school choice initiatives. Using ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and a longitudinal survey instrument, data collected occurred over three years is used to examine the social context of the school in relation to students' transitions to college. Primary data includes school documents and publicly available city and state reporting documents. These multiple sources of information facilitate structured analysis of the mechanisms that influence student outcomes.

The original fieldwork primarily occurred in classrooms and at events and school activities. This fieldwork included participant observation, observation involved cofacilitating an interscholastic academic club, including teaching assistance and tutoring, mentoring, and coaching of students for academic competitions. Additional fieldwork involved observation of the neighborhood around the school, alternate schools in the area, and the community areas in which students spent time after school and resided. Further, for the year prior to the study, the author lived and participated in the community. The author's status as a college educated, Spanish-speaking Latina was referenced by the students and faculty; it served as an asset in gaining access and trust.

Table 1. Distribution of Observations

Activity	Hours of Observation
Classrooms	
Math	52.2
Science	3.0
Social science	9.0
Humanities	23.0
Advisory (special homeroom)	2.2
Teacher Interviews	2.7
Administrator Meetings	12.1
Full Faculty Meetings	1.8
School Wvents	9.1
Cofacilitating Academic Club	
Club meetings	14.0
Tournaments	38.0
Informal Observations	
Public spaces inside school	4.1
Public spaces outside school	9.9
Total	181.1

Note: The author conducted these observations over a three-year period.
Table 1 shows the hours of observation over the three years; these include over one hundred distinct classroom and event observations totaling 181.1 hours. Classroom observations were conducted during two periods: between May and August of 2005 and between April and May of 2008.3 Fieldwork focused on college preparatory and mathematics courses, which serve as key gatekeeper courses to college (Riegle-Crumb, 2006). Both teachers and students reported math to be the greatest academic challenge for the school's students.

Ethnographic observations were supplemented with in-depth interviews with 22 students, and prolonged and repeated interactions with four alumni and 10 administrators and teachers. Many interview respondents were also observed in repeated field observations, which sometimes included additional informal interviews. One respondent, noted later in the paper, was formally interviewed twice. Interview respondents were recruited from math and English classrooms and from academic teams. Efforts to recruit a representative sample of interview respondents required the use of multiple incentive structures, including a small honorarium and trust developed through tutoring assistance in class and academic clubs. As depicted in Table A1, the semistructured interview protocol was designed to explore students' educational backgrounds, subjective and academic experiences at Santiago, ethnic and racial identities, future plans, the personal and social resources they mobilize in response to obstacles, and their plans for transitions to college, and college plans. Table A1 displays interview questions by focal category of reference: self, family/home, friends, teachers/school adults, and other potential sources of either comparison or support. This three-year study generated 1,923 pages of transcripts, memos, and interview notes.

In addition to the field and interview data, an original survey was developed and administered. The Santiago Educational Longitudinal Study of 2006 (SELS: 2006) probes on students' demographic backgrounds, school attachment and engagement, and educational aspirations and transitions. Many survey items were replicated from the nationally representative Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002).

To further situate this case study, publicly available school district statistics on high school graduation and college enrollment were used to compare and contrast Santiago students' outcomes with those of two comparison groups from students' most commonly reported second-choice schools: Magnet School A and Neighborhood School B. After fieldwork was completed, additional data on Santiago students' subsequent college enrollments were obtained from Santiago's alumni coordinator and further verified by data received from Chicago Public Schools' Department of Postsecondary Education and by online verification of students' enrollment through their colleges' websites. Current enrollment figures are accurate through March 2009, between 8 and 32 months after students' graduation from Santiago.

ANALYSES

The results presented in this manuscript are based on analyses multiple data sources employed in this study. Qualitative analyses focusing on the interview and field data, which explain the operation of school regard and its role in students' transition to college. The quotations presented here were selected from students and teachers that were representative of those encountered in the school over the course of the three-year study. Ethnographic field data and in-depth interview transcripts were coded simultaneously with data collection. Analytic codes designed by the author were used to categorize field and interview data, consistent with established coding procedures (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding procedures began with open codes related to students' academic background, performed and reported ethnic and racial identities, academic engagement, social class, family support, friendship networks, relationships with teachers, and college and career aspirations.

The quantitative component of the study investigates the effect of students' expectations and academic preparation on respondents' transitions to college. As this study is interested in the effects of school contexts, the sophomore cohort is the focus of these analyses. SELS: 2006 includes 307 students in grades 10-12. The analytic sample consists of those students who were in 10th grade in the base year ($n = 106$). A multiple logistic regression (mlogit) analysis estimates the influence of educational expectations on students' initial postsecondary enrollment. Finally, the relationship between a preliminary measure of school regard (from teachers) and students' transitions to college is assessed.

VARIABLES

College Transition

Initial postsecondary enrollment. While there were multiple college outcome variables to choose from (student's self-report, graduation list, administrative school record, public records from the city (aggregate reporting), the administrative school record of students' initial college enrollment (within one year of graduation) was the most reliable and complete option. The author coded these records as follows: 1 No college/ left Santiago, 2 Community or online college, and 3 Four-year college.

Barron's ranking (modified, initial enrollment). Students' transition outcomes are coded to correspond to the Barron's Admissions Competitiveness Index (1 Most competitive, 7 Special). This data was compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics and available through the author's restricted use NCES data license. The coding is an exact match for levels 1-6: 1 Most competitive, 2 Highly competitive, 3 Very competitive, 4 Competitive, 5 Less competitive, 6 Noncompetitive. Because there were no students at Santiago who enrolled in Barron's level 7 (Special) schools however, and Barron's rankings do not cover community and online colleges, the coding for levels 7-9 was created by the author, on the same basis as the variable above: 7 Community and online colleges, 8 No college, and 9 Left Santiago.

Educational Expectations

ELS: 2002 and SELS: 2006 respondents were asked to respond to the question "As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?" Possible choices ranged from "less than high school graduation" to advanced degrees. For analyses of Santiago students' expectations, the range is condensed to: 1 Less than graduate from college, 2 Graduate from college, 3 Graduate school, 4 Don't know. Traditionally, "don't know" responses are excluded from analyses and treated as missing data (e.g., Rubin, Stern, & Vehovar, 1995). However, recent findings suggest that black and Latino high school students are more uncertain about how far they may go on in their schooling, and this uncertainty is a meaningful indicator of their expectations (Perez-Felkner, 2012).

Mathematics Level

The most robust predictor of college transition in the survey was selected as a covariate (level of mathematics course in 10th grade), a decision supported by extensive work on the effect of mathematics course taking on college enrollment (e.g., Dalton, Ingels, Downing, & Bozick, 2007). Possible responses reflect the range of options available to Santiago students: 1 Pre-algebra, 2 Algebra 1, 3 Algebra 2, 4 Pre-calculus, 5 Calculus, 6 Other.

School Regard (Teachers)

The SELS survey included psychometric items used in studies of various topics (e.g., institutional support for novice teachers), beginning with the prompt: "Most people think about how other people see them." These items were modified by the author to relate to students, as shown in appendix Figure A3. While these items were not designed to measure school regard, and do not capture students' perceptions of their peers' regard for them, they serve as a utilitarian guide to how school regard could be operationalized and measured as a predictor of students' educational outcomes. Respondents were asked to report on how teachers viewed them on several qualities, including the five that comprise this scale: as "organized," "important," "successful," "intelligent," and "deserving of respect." Possible responses range from Not at All (1) to Very (4). To assess within-sample variation and correct for potential respondent biases, the author standardized students' responses to the normal curve for the distribution. The mean of these standardized scores is used in this analysis, on the same four-point scale.

SITE SELECTION

Because the research question pertains to how black and Latino students' social contexts influence their postsecondary transitions, it was important to identify a school site with the following characteristics: a substantial proportion of students going on to college and a predominantly underrepresented minority, low-income student population. To select the school, the author used publicly available Chicago Public School district data on student achievement, school locations, and demographic characteristics. From this search, Santiago Charter High School (*pseudonym*) emerged as an ideal candidate. Santiago educates youth who enter with a range of academic skills.[4] In 2005, 86% of Santiago families were classified by Illinois state guidelines as low-income. Approximately two-thirds of the class enrolled in postsecondary school within a year of graduation. Nearly all of these students were the first generation in their family to attend college.

These figures made Santiago an intriguing site to study peer social capital in students' transition to college (the initial research focus), among a primarily racial-ethnic minority student population with high but nuanced levels of participation in postsecondary education. Students attending this school are selected by lottery. For admission to Chicago's charter high schools, lotteries are held in students' eighth grade year.[5] This study focuses on the graduating classes of 2006-2008 (the entering cohorts of 2002-2004). The overall acceptance rates for the entry cohorts of 2003 and 2004 were 44.6% and 54.3%, respectively, from which the proportions of lottery-admitted students who matriculated into Santiago in 2003 and 2004 were 83.3% and 84.1%, respectively.[6] Santiago aimed its recruitment efforts at the elementary and middle schools in an area in which prospective high school students were predominantly of Mexican and/or Puerto Rican descent.

CURRENT STUDY

A consistent theme emerged from analyses of the interviews and fieldwork: the importance the students attached to being valued by teachers and others in the school. Students told stories about the strength of the relationships they felt with their teachers and friends. When they encountered challenges on the path through school to college, those who felt valued positioned themselves as being well supported, whereas those who did not feel particularly valued framed themselves as being alone. More specifically, systematic patterns emerged around how strongly students believed that their school peers and school adults expected them to succeed at Santiago, and in college. This paper defines *school regard* as this perception of teachers' and classmates' regard for students' school-related potential. Previous studies have emphasized the role of individual teachers' expectations. This study finds that while students indeed interpret and internalize the expectations and support they receive at school, their perceptions of these signals are oriented around teachers and classmates as collectivities, rather than individuals.

RESULTS

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF COLLEGE-GOING

Although it was marketed as a college preparatory school for future four-year college attendees, by the end of high school, Santiago students had diverse aspirations and pursued distinct pathways after graduation. In the spring of their sophomore year, Santiago students— most of whom self-identified as Hispanic or Latino—reported college aspirations which were higher on average than those of Latino and black students represented in the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) database on the same survey item.7 Asked how far in school they expect to go, 67.9% of the 106 Santiago sophomores expected to graduate from college or higher.8 41.5% of Santiago sophomores expected to go as far as graduating from college, compared to 35.0% of Latino ELS sophomores and 37.3% of black ELS sophomores (Ingels, Burns, Charleston, Chen, Cataldi, & Owings, 2005, pp. 128-129).

Their relatively high aspirations notwithstanding, preparing Santiago students for college is a major, multipronged, and not always successful effort. While a commonly held goal of Santiago sophomores, college remains an abstract aspiration for most of high school for many Santiago students. Compared to even their black and Latino peers in ELS, Santiago students were also more likely to report that they "don't know" how far they plan to get beyond high school: 21.7% of Santiago sophomores selected "don't know," compared with 13.0% of Latino and 8.5% of black ELS sophomores). College may be their goal, but many Santiago students did not clearly understand the differences in returns to degree between two-year colleges and four-year colleges, and differences within those types. Despite the branding of the high school as being for college preparation, preparing students to successfully transition to college was a significant and multipronged undertaking.

ADVISORY STRUCTURES AS NONACADEMIC SUPPORTS

In general, Santiago faculty regularly utilized non-academic mechanisms to achieve educational gains. In addition to their classroom responsibilities, Santiago's teachers served as students' advisors and mentors. Each teacher acted as an advisor to a cohort of students, matched by gender and the alphabetical order of their surname, which they follow for four years. Students met daily in Advisory, a more intensive version of a daily homeroom class.

Advisory groups functioned as in-school support and mentoring structures. Primarily, they consisted of a four-year social group of peers, matched by the alphabetical order of their surname. Led by an assigned same-gender faculty member, these groups served as social networks, within which faculty and student peers might share educational aspirations, behavioral norms, and social support, across academic track separations. Secondly, this period functioned as instructional time for advisors to teach lessons about time management, using computers, and utilizing the available college preparatory resources such as the omnipresent ACT workbooks. Finally, these advisory groups are intended to provide consistent mentoring for the students. A rising sophomore, Miguel Cortés cited his advisor as being particularly supportive to him during the previous year, "[My advisor] helped me figure out what to do, for example to take this class [a summer enrichment math class], and be really helpful and . . . really nice." Mr. Hamilton, Miguel's advisor, helped him advance to the next highest math level; Miguel graduated as his class's salutatorian three years later. Some advisors were more charismatic than others, and some may have been more effective than others. While the academic caliber of advisees should have been nearly randomly distributed (given alphabetical assignment), observations at graduation and around the school showed certain advisory group-level variance in students' enthusiasm, academic accolades, and open displays of affection and appreciation towards their advisor.

Overall, numerous students reported that these groups served as moral supports. Groups go on retreats together. These bonds border on the familial, creating school-based family support systems. This can happen with other teachers at the school. Evelyn Santos referred to her favorite teacher Mr. Renstraum as "the father I never had" and reported that when she feels down at home, she would "come to school and then my advisor would give me a hug and then I would just feel so good." Many students in the school did not have fathers who were involved in their lives, as evidenced in the interviews, survey responses and comments, and ethnographic fieldwork. Many of these and other students described parents' multiple jobs and their own adoption of domestic responsibilities, which middle and higher income children tend not to be expected to perform (e.g., afterschool care of younger siblings and older relatives, navigating financial aid paperwork for college applications). By helping students navigate these more adult roles, faculty's relationships with students were strengthened.

Students' strong ties to their teachers may explain why race–ethnicity did not form a significant barrier to students' social capital and academic development with their teachers. Seventy-one percent of the teachers were white and 10% are Latino, whereas only 4% of the students were white and 83% were Latino. Two-thirds of teachers were female. Although moments of disconnect around racial–ethnic and socioeconomic issues occurred from time to time, on the whole, teachers visibly strived to bridge these gaps (e.g., through expressions of interest in students' backgrounds). While they did not always succeed, the active presence of minority teachers likely contributed to the efficacy of these broader efforts and particularly supported some students, especially those coming from more segregated neighborhoods and schools.

Advisors generally reciprocated this engagement. Several teachers explained that their perceived four-year responsibility for their advisory group would keep them at Santiago even if other motivations would lead them to consider moving or changing jobs. The advisory group structure may have also furthered the commitment of both students and teachers to the goals of Santiago. For example, upperclassmen did not experience the school's strong orientation to discipline as a burden as strongly as did matriculating students. A rising senior who left Santiago her sophomore year to live with her father out-of-state and returned the following year, Lydia Santana reflected:

Some people are like, oh, it's too strict or this and this and that. I went to a real high school with almost 5,000 students, and it was like, crazy. Nobody knew what was going on, you don't even know your teachers, and [pause] I didn't like it at all. I liked it because you could have *fun* but in the long run, what is fun gonna do, you know? That's why I wanted to come back here.

Students' bonds with teachers appeared to temper the resistance that they might otherwise have embodied in response to the school leadership's emphasis on discipline and order, which students consistently disliked.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH TEACHERS

Only one question in the interview protocol specifically referred to teachers ("Are there any teachers or staff members that have been particularly helpful in some way?"). Nonetheless, teachers were discussed at length in many interviews, often in advance of this question. Students' relationships with teachers and peers were referenced repeatedly as a source of support and sustenance. Correspondingly, teachers demonstrated their interest in students' success and well-being. In between periods and out of earshot of students (but in front of the author), teachers shared concerns with each other about individual students' slipping grades and absences, sometimes because of challenges at home, and advocated that the other look out for the student. Alternately, positive events were shared about students by teachers, both to other teachers and in front of other students, sometimes on a large scale, in the many prominent poster displays in the school hallways and stairways and/or at the weekly "town hall" assemblies that frequently featured student performances and recognitions.

In their classrooms, some teachers pointedly demonstrated their confidence in students' abilities to learn the material. These teachers directed concerted efforts to make the material engaging and accessible. While balancing these concerns with the intense curriculum necessary to move their students toward college readiness, teachers frequently oriented instruction to allow students to present their work and enable teachers to praise their efforts. This negotiation can be seen in Eleanor Hoffman's hour and a half class session on writing structured English papers:

I would like to have some of you read your paragraphs. There are a lot of really great ones. I'm really proud of you.
You've done a lot of hard work . . . Ruben, you had a *great* body paragraph. Why don't you read it [to the class]?

After personally editing students' writing, she ended the class by allowing students to model their work to the other students in the class and encouraging their efforts. Recognizing the pedagogical challenges presented to them by their students and under the direction of their principal, the teaching staff responded by employing strategies to meet these challenges while maintaining confidence in students' ability to work towards their academic achievement. Teachers disseminated this confidence to their students through the frequent employment of students as peer leaders and praising students' successes during in-class educational games such as History Jeopardy and Math problem solving games. Both more seasoned teachers like social studies teacher Darnell Evans and junior AmeriCorps teachers such as English teacher Stacey Nelson employed these games regularly. Various teachers reported that starting on homework problems within the class setting fostered students' homework completion, making academic engagement outside of school more palatable and less intimidating by performing example homework and test questions under supervised instruction. For example, Tricia Coleman encouraged her students to celebrate and track their achievements. Contextualizing her approach to teaching Santiago students, she explained:

I try to make it fun, using games to get them excited about Math. It's important to get them started on homework in school. We try to do that. Some of them have work or family responsibilities at home or just aren't motivated to start. Getting them to work through the problems here in class makes it easier for them. I want to see them do well.

This practice is supported by educational research (see Corno & Xu, 2004), and was observed to be widely practiced at Santiago. Teachers' explanations excluded an important dimension however: performing collaboratively among classroom peers. Student peers were observed to use each other both formally and informally as classroom mentors and supporters. The desire to see students succeed was further communicated in the themed community assembly periods, the motivational paraphernalia decorating the school's hallways and classrooms, the school's emphasis on participation in athletics, and at school events.

COLLEGE GUIDANCE AND TRANSITIONS

Both College Guidance teachers I came to know explained the challenges this presents for Santiago's instructors: Mr. Stevens noted that "at [a suburban public high school], it's the parents pushing the train; here it's me."9 Teachers and students reported that families are not always able to help their youth navigate the path toward college admission and enrollment. As Mr. Stevens attested, at this college preparatory high school, the school leads students' postsecondary preparation efforts. My observations concurred. Many Santiago families had limited experience with college (even if they have another child who has enrolled), as well as limited availability during workday hours, and/or concerns about language limitations. Santiago tapped the school's college guidance instructor (whose teaching assignment includes traditional core subjects) to organize college trips for students, help families negotiate and understand financial aid award letters, and advise on which colleges to pursue. Mr. Stevens' successor, Ms. Garcia, expressed concern: "We still have a long ways to go in terms of college advising." She reminds us that the college matriculation patterns of Santiago's graduates do not yet match the aspirations of its students or its faculty.

Table 2 compares Santiago seniors' postsecondary outcomes to those of graduating students from the two schools that Santiago students most

commonly reported they would have attended if not admitted to Santiago. Overall, Santiago students transitioned to college at higher rates and/or to more selective institutions. Santiago students were likely to be enrolled in college at more than twice the rate of the most popular neighborhood school by November 1st after their graduation. Magnet School A, which selectively enrolls students based on their high academic skills and training, has 75.6% of its graduates enrolled in college the fall after high school, nearly 9 points higher than that of Santiago.

Comparing the proportion of students who are enrolled in college from Santiago and Magnet School A, Santiago's students are nearly twice as likely to enroll in college outside of the state and two and a half times as likely to enroll in a very selective college. This comparison suggests that the structured supports at Santiago could be associated with their students' decisions to go to more selective universities (as opposed to undermatching) and farther from home than their magnet school peers. Nonetheless, Santiago's college placement ranges widely, despite school leaders' and teachers' efforts to organize their school around practices intended to align students' activities and behaviors with their college ambitions (see Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). This heterogeneity of outcomes appears related to students' response to setbacks during their high school career, a series of obstacles that may be particularly frequently encountered by disadvantaged and underrepresented minority students.

Table 2. College Enrollment Data, Class of 2006, in Comparison to Most Cited High Schools which Students Would Have Otherwise Attended

College Placement	Santiago	Magnet School A	Neighborhood School B	
			Number of Graduates	
91	929	364		
			Enrolled in College	
67.0%	75.6%	30.2%		4 year college
82.0%	80.5%	54.5%		Outside Illinois
18.0%	9.7%	N/A		Full-time
80.3%	80.2%	53.6%		Very Selective
34.0%	14.0%	N/A		

SOURCE. National Student Clearinghouse Data, reported by Department of Postsecondary Education and Student Development, Office of High School Programs, Chicago Public Schools. Report published April 24, 2007. Includes only students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution prior to November 1st. Some post-secondary institutions and some students who did not apply for loans (e.g., received full tuition scholarships) are not included in this data.

NOTE. The comparison schools were selected based on their status as the most popular selections for the item: "Where would you have attended had you not gotten into Santiago?" Using analyses of students' survey responses about the school to which they would have attended should they not have won the Santiago entry, the two schools which stood out as the most common second choice schools were designated Magnet School A and Neighborhood School B.

<div align="center">ENCOUNTERING AND OVERCOMING OBSTACLES</div>

Nearly all respondents volunteered accounts of academic and personal hurdles they encountered during their time at Santiago. Some respondents reported feeling school adults' and peers' belief in them during these times, and how it helped them remain resilient in the face of these struggles. The extent to which students encountered each of these challenges varied as well, but most students seemed to experience at least one, if not all. Five primary and at times interrelated stressors emerged: academic grades, family estrangement, family responsibilities, stereotype threat, and burnout.

Academic Grades

Some students encountered seemingly mundane but nonetheless consequential struggles, including not meeting the high academic expectations touted in the school mission. Jonny Diaz serves as such an example. Although Jonny spoke favorably of how Santiago prepared him for his future, he found himself in a "hole" regarding his college options because he did not graduate with sufficiently rigorous grades to be eligible for a four-year college. Jonny explained,

> I got off-track my sophomore year. But now that I dug a hole for myself, it's hard to try to get out . . . My options are really limited.

While he expressed some satisfaction with his options, he acknowledges they are limited because he could not get back on track to a four-year college degree. Academic issues are transparent on the surface but emerge for myriad reasons. For example, some students had challenges in their family that kept them home from school, and some suffered health issues. Others were less connected to the school. Although the school is organized around supporting and facilitating the realization of college ambitions, Jonny reported primarily going to his family for guidance and support about college, rather than school peers and adults. Some students, like Jonny, do not perceive the support they desire to help them balance these issues with preparing for and attending college.

Family Estrangement

Students' families by definition were supportive of the Santiago experiment when initially enrolling their children in the lottery and for enrollment in their ninth grade year. However, this enthusiasm often waned as the demands on students' time and effort increased, and students' energies became increasingly centered on the school rather than on the family. Sonia Bermudez, an 18-year-old senior whose father was in prison and lived with her mother, younger siblings, and nearby extended family, reported feeling problematically distant from her family during her time at Santiago.

> Junior year I had a lot of problems. It was a breaking point I guess with my family. I guess I lost touch with them. I was always edgy and moody. And I guess I had a lot of downfall at home. It reflected in my school work, where I felt like didn't want to do it anymore. And I guess your brain is just like— at a point it says, like, no more. But I had to really pull myself together that year. I mean, I salvaged what I had academically to Bs and some As and Cs. And I'm still paying for it this year. I mean, I'm so happy I got into [*highly competitive colleges*], but that junior year dropped my GPA really bad, and you could see it in my face that I was struggling, and I was always tired and there was something wrong. So for me to come back from that and go to college and career and do what I have to do *(pause)*, it was really hard for me to come up from that.
> I: Do you feel like the struggle came from academics and then your family and then circled back?
> Sonia: It was that and also money problems. And I guess I also really needed a father and he wasn't there, like physically, when I needed him. And so I was giving up and falling into this cycle of failure.

The quote above demonstrates how these factors can be interrelated. What may have appeared to be simple academic deficits were associated with Sonia's estrangement from her family as well as general stress and exhaustion. For others, obstacles existed in other configurations.

Family Responsibilities

Some students managed to negotiate family obligations and their aspirations, as in the case of Rosario Guzmán. Prior to her senior year, she expressed concerns about going away to college:

> At first, I wanted to go to another state, but then I thought, you know, it's going to be real hard for me because I have a lot of family here. I don't even see my family as often, and if I leave, I'm not going to see them at all.

She then elaborated her sense of responsibility for helping her grandmother take care of her mentally ill uncle.

> I help my grandma a lot with taking care of him, but I don't want to leave her with taking care of him by herself. My mother *helps*, but since she's working she can't help as much she wants to. So since I'm always available, I'm the one who helps him.

Whether students were helping with their younger siblings, older relatives, or financial contributions to the family through part-time jobs, the consequences were not limited to day-to-day challenges of managing school and family responsibilities. Rather, students often felt either direct pressure or personal guilt at leaving these responsibilities for school, especially given the sacrifices many of their adult caregivers have made in helping them get a quality education thus far.

Stereotype Threat

Among this primarily ethnic minority student body, stereotype threat as we traditionally conceive it was not a primary issue for students. Rather, the threat "in the air" appeared to be primarily external. As noted in the author's dissertation (citation withheld for peer review), students would often position their school as being "not white" (even when the student saying this fit common definitions of "white"). In such cases, they were comparing their school to the more socially advantaged schools they competed against in interscholastic events, rankings, and college admittances. Teachers and administrators engaged in this discourse with students as well, although their framing was focused primarily on financial resources rather than on race. Although motivational paraphernalia was omnipresent in school classrooms and hallways, the sense of Santiago as a school for disadvantaged underdogs was reinforced over my years of repeated visits to the school. Students seemed to internalize this status, in particular around concerns that they might not "make it" at college [i.e., the predominantly white institutions most of the high achievers applied to]. Although she participated in a scholarship-funded summer college experience program across the country the previous summer, senior Iris De Jesús discussed concerns about being ready for college.

> I know that I'm going to do it. I don't want to be one of those people who drops out their first year. I wouldn't let myself be that way. I wouldn't let myself go down that low, just to let everything go, especially with all the scholarships and everything. But it's just hard to know that I'll be able to go up to their standards . . . I'll try and I'll go to the writing

centers. But that's what scares me the most, the whole academic aspect.

Iris vocalized fears that she would be like one of "those people" who fails to meet the standards of the universities that she aspired to attend. While she intellectually understood supports in place at these universities (e.g., the "writing centers"), there was clear anxiety masked in her voice. She describes the potential shame of someone who has been invested in and "let everything go," falling that "low." She and others discussed not wanting to be a "statistic," with clear awareness of what is expected of them by society and uneasiness about how they might be viewed by the students and faculty they will encounter when they leave Santiago.

Burnout

Underrepresented children and youth have disproportionately higher health problems than others, among them asthma and diabetes. Further, socioeconomic disadvantage and minority status are associated with financial hardships and societal prejudices. These stressors were likely exacerbated by the vigorous college-readiness workload, expected extracurricular commitments, and public transport commutes many of them managed. Notwithstanding, Santiago's young students have notable variance in their self-reported emotional and physical health. Table 3 depicts students' self-reported emotional and physical health during the base year of the survey, ranging from "poor" to "excellent." While 54.3% of 10th through 12th graders rated their emotional health as "very good" or "excellent," 18.9% believed that they were only in "fair" or "poor" health. Fewer students ranked themselves on the lower end of the scale with respect to physical health; only 11.2% rated themselves as "fair" or "poor." Nevertheless, assuming that students probably tended to overrate rather than underrate their well-being, it seems meaningful that nearly one-fifth of the students who had spent more than one year at Santiago rated themselves as being in low emotional health.

Table 3. Emotional and Physical Health of 10th, 11th, and 12th Grade Students

Health Indicators	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Total
Emotional	4.5%	14.4%	26.9%	22.9%	31.4%	100.0%
Physical	2.7%	8.5%	30.0%	26.0%	32.7%	100.0%

NOTE. *N*= 223 students in May 2006, the baseline survey year. This data comes from responses to the base year question: "How would you rate your health?" (a) Physical (b) Emotional. These items are based on the U.S. General Social Survey items on self-rated health and well-being.

To understand the emergence and operation of stress and exhaustion, we can revisit Sonia's discussion of her difficult junior year at Santiago.

> I remember freshman, sophomore, and junior year, I remember I would get up and be on the bus by 6:30 [a.m.], swimming by 7, school by 9, and I wouldn't leave school until seven o'clock [p.m.]. And it just took up so much mental energy to sit there and all that work demand and those classes. I mean, I overwhelmed myself with all those extracurriculars. Sophomore year I did it again. And I guess junior year I tried to, and that is where I lost it. It was just a total strain on my body and my mind. And then I'd still have to babysit and help my other brother with his homework and still meet the demands of home life.

As discussed earlier, Sonia hit a breaking point and almost did not continue at Santiago, and on her intentioned path to a competitive university and a career in neurosurgery. She did continue however, while others did not. The remainder of the paper focuses on the natural question: why?
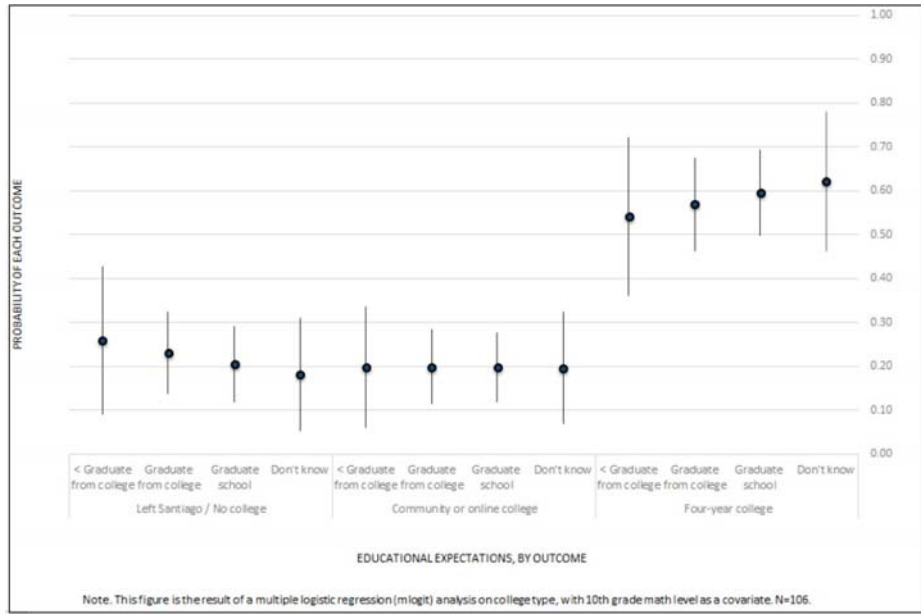
NOT PERSISTING

Midway through high school, some Santiago students did not expect to attend and graduate from a four-year college. Recall the survey item discussed above on students' educational expectations. 26.4% of Santiago sophomores expected to attend or complete graduate education. However, 10.4% of Santiago students expected less than a four-year college degree. Specifically, 3.8% of Santiago sophomores expected a high school diploma, GED, or less (compared to 11.7% of Latino and 9.6% of black ELS sophomores, Ingels et al., 2005, pp. 128–129). Meanwhile, 6.6% expected to enroll in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution, but did not expect "college" graduation. It could be the case that these expectations in 10th grade explain variation in students' transitions to college.

Figure 2 shows the results of a multiple logistic regression analysis predicting students' initial postsecondary enrollment. This technique is used to predict multiple categorical outcomes, in the same model. Specifically, the graph indicates the influence of 10th grade educational expectations on students' probability of one of the following transition outcomes: a four-year college, community or online college, or no college/leaving Santiago before graduation. Given the limited size of the sophomore cohort in the case study school (*n* = 106 sophomores), a parsimonious model is necessary to allow sufficient degrees of freedom. For this reason, only the strongest independent covariate is used as a control in the model, as an indicator of academic readiness for college: 10th grade mathematics level. Additional analyses were conducted and are available by request from the author, showing similar results with fewer and greater numbers of covariates. The error bars in the graph indicate the 95% confidence interval.

The results show remarkably limited variation on the probability of each outcome, across each expectation. The influence of expectations on the chances of initially enrolling in community or online colleges is particularly flat, with wide variation. Specifically, students had a 20% probability of attending one of these institutions whether they had the lowest expectations (*less than college graduation*), highest expectations (*graduate school*), or unclear expectations (*don't know*). Furthermore, the variance in the probability of attending online or community colleges, as indicated by the error bars, ranged from a 9% to 43% in the sample for those who did not expect to attend or graduate from college. While the variance in probability of each outcome is not as wide for the left Santiago/no college and four-year college groups, the variation is similarly wide. In sum, neither the model as a whole (Prob > chi^2 = 0.019) nor educational expectations in particular sufficiently explain variation in Santiago students' transitions to college.

Figure 2. Probabilities of Transition to Two- and Four-Year Colleges, by 10th Grade Educational Expectations

Note. This figure is the result of a multiple logistic regression (mlogit) analysis on college type, with 10th grade math level as a covariate. N=106.

One potential explanation for variation in students' outcomes that emerged from the fieldwork and interviews is their experience of school regard. During the first year of observations, I became aware that Santiago students and alumni who were accustomed to being praised and buoyed with social support in school took note when they did not experience it. Three alumnae from the school's second graduating class, all attending highly selective liberal arts colleges, expressed frustration that the first question they received from teachers when returning to visit Santiago to was the same: "Are you going back next year?" They reported feeling "extremely hurt" by this question, wondering whether teachers had lost faith in their ability to "make it" through four years at predominantly white institutions, far from home.

Each year, Santiago would send several of its strongest students to the most highly selective colleges in the country. Santiago students did not, however, universally graduate with the academic preparation or grades needed to be successful in college. For example, on grades and mathematics course completion, robust indicators of students' success in college, Santiago showed only moderate success. The majority of Santiago students either failed to complete Algebra 2 before graduation or, if they did take advanced mathematics coursework, performed poorly on Advanced Placement tests, indicating that they had not sufficiently learned the material. The cumulative unweighted GPAs of the 106 graduating seniors ranged from 3.83 (A) to 1.20 (D).

Teachers reported that students who do not persist in college tend to be the students struggling with academic, financial, and family issues. As discussed earlier however, most Santiago students struggled with one or all of these sets of issues, to varying degrees. Students experienced the hardships and stresses that accompanied their socioeconomic status and cultural norms around family responsibility. The degree to which these factors influenced their persistence on their intended college pathways appeared to be associated with school regard.

SCHOOL REGARD: SEEING ONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH OTHERS' LENSES

Teachers and School Adults

Teachers were positioned to serve as role models. Just to the right of the doorknob, and below the small signs demarcating the room number and teacher name, college pennants announced their teachers' undergraduate institutions. These alma maters tended to be local selective universities, with both less highly selective and more highly selective universities dotting the remaining entryways. Students took note. One student remarked about Mr. Renstraum, "He went to Harvard, I mean, wow." Perhaps in part because of this high visibility of college-related prestige, students generally treated teachers, and peers, with respect. This respect allowed some teachers to build strong, enduring relationships with students. The language used by students indicates not only that they valued these relationships, but also that they often saw their own value *through* these relationships.

Senior Peyton Williams expressed appreciation for his teachers and his peers who had helped sustain him during his academic and health struggles in school. He compared Santiago to his previous school, and related his motivation at each.

> Peyton: I just – I wasn't (*pause*) trying to achieve higher things that I could have achieved [at my old school]. It was more so that I was sort of playing around I guess. It's more so that I hadn't matured . . . there wasn't anybody pushing me anyway and I figured that, so it was like that.
> I: So what's different here at Santiago?
> Peyton: So different. You got teachers on you, smaller class sizes. More help, you can get more help here. 'Cause I, the stuff in grammar school, like the Math and stuff, I wasn't getting, and they didn't want to stop the class to help me get it. But over here, you can stay after school to get help with it.

A severe illness affected his high school academic and basketball career his junior year, pulling him out of school for over three weeks. Peyton credited his ability to get back on track to his teachers.

> I: How would you describe your desire to work on your schoolwork over the course of time?
> Peyton: It elevated. Because I got sick my junior year, and I thought it was phenomenal what the teachers did for me. They actually came to my house and taught me when I got out of the hospital. And I found that— I was very appreciative about that, I think . . . 'Cause if I had gone to any other school, I would have had to fail. 'Cause I missed so much school because I was sick . . . And then, at school, they allowed me to come in here and do work too, and I appreciate that, and it was one on one. 'Cause my doctor said that they didn't want me in a classroom setting and stuff like that. They didn't think I would be successful either. I proved them wrong in that, that, too. [My doctors] didn't think I would be where I was at now.

It appeared to make an impression on him that while his doctors did not believe in his ability to bounce back, his teachers did, and made personal efforts to help him get back on track. Peyton was not the strongest student in his grade. He graduated Santiago with a 2.2 GPA. Interested in a career in basketball or in elementary education, he matriculated into an out-of-state selective university with a solid basketball program and a major in elementary education. While his basketball career may have been a hoop dream, Peyton communicated focus on getting good grades in college and preparing for a teaching career.

Teachers may also help sustain less socially integrated students' engagement in school. David Robertson was interviewed twice over the course of the study, first during the summer after his first year and again in the spring of his senior year. David and Peyton were among the 12% of Santiago students who were identified as black during the study years, according to the school's Illinois state report cards. In the first interview, he explained that his mother's high school friend sent her daughter to Santiago and recommended the school: "Her mom said, it's strict, and good on academics. So my mom said yes, it's a perfect school." A similar anecdote was repeated in our second interview, three years later. Notwithstanding, choosing schools and staying in them was not a casual decision in his family. From kindergarten through eighth grade, David attended five different schools, all in the same city: charter, religious, and traditional public schools among them. When we spoke in the summer after his ninth grade year, David acknowledged that he was entertaining the idea of transferring after his sophomore year. When asked why, he quietly said that Santiago was "okay," but "it could be better." He later explained initial apprehension about attending the school, where he did not know any students nor anyone around the school's neighborhood. Notwithstanding, he declared that:

> the teachers were excellent. They were honest – the first day of school, they told us everything we needed to do, that was everything we needed to do, to pass. So, excellent, excellent staff.

In comparison to his neighborhood high schools, David said that attending one of those schools is not something he ever thinks about:

> I would rather stay here. Because it's more academically challenging, better behaving students, just yeah, the whole situation's better here.

When asked about the thoughtful expression he wore, he told me that a staff member was shot at his local school. He then identified his predominantly black neighborhood as "rough."

While his intention to attend a safe school— despite his 2 hour and 20 minute round-trip commute— was clear, any enthusiasm David had for Santiago was limited to the teachers and staff during that first interview. In his senior year, David appeared more poised and confident, and was consistently in the presence of his peers. Interestingly, when asked what he thought was most important about his Santiago experience, it was still all about teachers.

> I: The school does a lot of work and talks about how it does a lot. For you personally, what aspects of the school have helped you move towards the goals that you have for yourself?
> David: The band teacher. And I've never taken band. I've only taken piano. And he really helped me (*pause*) personally. I wanted to do music in college. But after he left, I haven't played trumpet at all. He would take time in the morning to help me practice. Mr. Evans has (*pause*) he's always been, he's always had a go-lucky attitude and is always, like, if you give respect, you get respect. And so our relationship is a respect relationship. And [the principal] - he helped me create the tennis team when no one else was trying to. He, Coach Peters, Mr. Evans . . . they've always been interested in my afterschool activities. Especially [the principal]. And also my advisor Mr. Renstraum. The past three years, he's also played an influential role in my life . . . not only did he have his teacher aspect to him, he also had this knowledgeable aspect to him. He loved to pass on knowledge.

David graduated that spring in the top half of his class with a 2.5 GPA and enrolled in a four-year college in the fall of that year.

Student Peers

For many Santiago students, peers who shared their struggles as well as aspirations served as an important support. As noted above, David's relationships with his teachers and school staff were perceived as being positive, supportive, and influential. Relationships with his classmates at Santiago were more nuanced. When interviewed after his freshman year, David identified his first friend as another black student who commuted with him on the city bus. After a full academic year, he had developed more friends through his classes. He offered the names of five of them, black students as well—male and female, mostly rising juniors and seniors. David was not as involved in school activities, but had a rich extracurricular life outside of school, from sports to choir to youth group. When re-interviewed in his senior year, he classified his friendships as primarily being outside of school:

> I grew up in the church. And most of my friends are in church. I grew up in the church. And most of my friends have the same lifestyle. Our parents are single mothers . . . same grammar school . . . and they're all college bound.

When asked how he felt about Santiago, he began by explaining changes in his peer group.

> I don't regret it at all. It's a change. It's been a life-changing experience for me, because my whole life, I've basically been surrounded by my fellow race. So coming here, I branched out to others. And I really felt the warmth and support that they embraced me with, and learned the differences that my culture doesn't have.

Despite these statements, and his seeming pride in the perception that he had the "most diverse lunch table" in the school cafeteria, David's discussion of his relationships with peers and his plans after high school suggested complicated feelings about his peer relationships at Santiago. His

lunch table was comprised of "three African Americans, [and] we also have Latinos and Mexicans." In describing this social group as well as his experience with peers at Santiago in general, the relationships were depicted as educational and somewhat formal:

> Latinos—I don't play the sports they play, like football . . . I play tennis. And when I so when I brought tennis, they said, tell me more about that. And when they play . . . I say tell me more about that . . . So we each exchanged, how should I say, we each exchanged information about sports, and academics, and other life experiences.

While he applied to a range of colleges, he decided that he preferred—and later enrolled in—a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). David stated that his experience in a predominantly Latino high school (Santiago) had "been an impact, but it hasn't been *that* much" of a factor in his preference for an HBCU. Some members of his family had attended and/or expressed appreciation for HBCUs, and David cited "comfort" as another reason for attending an HBCU. When asked about his expectations for an HBCU, David responded:

> Personally I think . . . I would learn a little bit more about my personal heritage from an HBCU college, a little bit more than I would from a white college. So it does have a little bit of a race issue, but it's not like, overbearing. Personally, I feel your people will teach you and guide you a little more about your past than another race will. So a little bit, that's also part of the reason why I think I want to go to an HBCU, black college.

David may have been particularly attuned to being a racial minority in a predominantly non-white school because of his previous and concurrent experiences in predominantly black social environments. While not explicitly articulating any isolation he might have felt at Santiago, David seemed not to experience the kind of shared experiences that he hoped to have with his peers at school.

Many of the other students in the interview sample had a different experience. Michelle Villanueva, then a senior, explained:

> You have all of your peers around you who are working just as hard but come from similar backgrounds. We all live in urban Chicago. None of us are wealthy . . . the funny thing about Santiago and my friends . . . is it's kind of whoa, you still live with your *dad*? That's *weird*. (*Laughs*). Like, you're not very cool, you don't know how it is to be with just a single mom. It's kind of like that. We make fun of each other, but I guess it's just to lighten the mood . . . But it *is* kind of cool because you do have support, kind of like, you know, I'm not doing this alone.

Michelle argued that having classmates who bear similar family and financial stress helped her manage her own challenges. Despite having the experiences of participating in a Ivy League summer study program the previous year, winning awards at regional competitions against privileged and polished teams, and winning admission to elite colleges, Michelle admitted that the idea of not having peers with similar backgrounds felt "kind of scary" to her.

Beyond shared background experiences, peer support for each other's high educational ambitions was widely available at Santiago. Many students appreciated the opportunity to have schoolmates with whom they share academic interests and values. Robert Suarez favorably compared the academic peer climate at Santiago with that of his assigned elementary school:

> I used to get made fun of for using proper English and told I was white. I found that ridiculous . . . When I came to Santiago, it's nice that we have a mix of everything . . . In this school, it isn't as if kids are saying, oh my god, they're using big words. You know, you feel more comfortable here. It's not something they mock you for."

Robert reported and displayed satisfaction with his peer community at Santiago, where he felt comfortable presenting himself as intellectually engaged without the frustration of the social rejection that he experienced at his previous school.

Although some students, such as senior Pedro Rivera, lamented the relative ethnic homogeneity of the school, many students reported high satisfaction with the academic peer climate at Santiago. By virtue of attending a school where they shared both socioeconomic backgrounds and high educational aspirations with their peers, Santiago students could experience the benefits of a college-going peer culture (Schneider, 2007) within a context in which they could be themselves, as alluded to by Robert and earlier by Evelyn. Reflecting on her first year, then rising sophomore Lourdes Navarro compared Santiago to her previous schools and her idea of what other high schools are like:

> It's been pretty, I don't know, awesome I guess. Just, I don't know. It's a good experience, a good first year experience. When you get along with upperclassmen, which isn't very common, and you get along with your peers and your advisory, which very - you're very close to them . . . You walk down the hallway and it's not that often that you know most of the people that are in the hallway or people know you. It's just that experience that you're so close to that many people makes it everything.

Lourdes was pleased that she was able to develop relationships across age cohorts as well as within age cohorts (in her advisory) as a first year student, and that she feels a closeness to a high proportion of student peers she encounters in the hallway and around school. Such closeness in school and community environments have been shown to foster the exchange of social capital more than environments with weaker relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988).

Accordingly, Santiago students appeared attuned to the aspirations of their close peers. Seventy-five percent of 10th through 12th graders reported that grades are "very important" to them. They reported perceiving grades to be "very important" at nearly as high levels for their closest friends: 73.0% rated grades as "very important" to their closest friend and 66.4% rated grades as "very important" to their next two closest friends. Suggestive of a minority culture of mobility (Neckerman, Carter, & Lee, 1999), this peer support laid a foundation for synergistic alignment between students' educational aspirations, those of their peers, and those of the in-school adults primarily responsible for helping them realize these aspirations.

Unpacking these data, Santiago students who transitioned to college, four-year colleges in particular, tended to have high levels of school regard. For example, Michelle Villanueva explained her awareness of the support of her peers in addressing her concerns about the peer environment of the elite colleges and universities to which she applied and was admitted. She described overcoming those concerns in part through her participation in an academic club that competed against the types of students who would be her college peers.

> I could kind of use [our success] in relation to college because these *are* the kinds of kids who've paid for their education. You can tell by the way they talk and the way they walk that they look very educated . . . We made our place known so that's kind of what I mean for school. I mean, if they're *paying* for their education, and we don't, but we work just as hard or maybe even harder, then we're on an equal basis . . . All these people looked cocky and confident and ready for us, but then we'd start speaking and we saw that *their* confidence was dropping, you know? . . . I thought it was great . . . it gave us hope.

Over the course of the five-month competition season, Michelle came to believe more strongly in her potential. The assurance gained from these victories could be "used in relation to college" to diminish the power of her previously perceived ability deficit in relation to her "more educated" college peers.

In this activity, Michelle believed that her peers, her teacher-advisor, the rival teams, and the judges she encountered held her potential in high esteem. Two years after high school, she remained on track to graduate from a top-ranked college. Santiago students involved in other interscholastic academic and sports programs have made similar claims about the effect of their extracurricular achievements on their persistence at Santiago and motivation for future education.

WITHIN-SCHOOL VARIATION IN SCHOOL REGARD

High School Regard: Teachers and Peers

Recall Sonia's account of how family and personal struggles during her junior year threatened to sabotage her otherwise strong likelihood of getting into the college of her choice. She described how a school friend and a teacher at school helped her rebuild and be resilient.

> Sonia: I was giving up and falling into this cycle of failure, and so I had to snap back in. I met my best friend that year and she like really helped me get back with my family, and I guess she was a strong figure for me . . .
> I: Was there anyone else?
> Sonia: Ms. Martinez. I guess that's why I call her my second mother. I remember—I never really emotionally cry, but I remember one day I just broke down crying because it was so hard, and I couldn't. My gym [class] was failing and my grades were dropping, and she just sat there and we planned my schedule for the rest of the year so that I could still graduate and be a senior this year. So I got up from it and she was right there with me.

In the end, her grades recovered sufficiently that she was accepted at and enrolled in a highly selective private university the following fall.

Low School Regard: Teachers and Peers

Although many students and school staff evoked the school-as-family metaphor during the study, this school functioned as a community focused on getting kids to college rather than on their moral and emotional development, for example. Will Vargas planned to enroll in the fall in a local campus of a popular private, nonselective vocational college with a low track- record for students graduating with a degree. He was highly motivated about computers and "being successful in the future and being happy, and not having to struggle with all these side jobs and local jobs [that non-graduates have to take]." Will explained his decision in terms of speed to job earnings and efficiency in aligning his education to his career pursuit.

However, a deeper mechanism appeared to be at play, given his reliance on non-school sources of college advice (e.g., advertisements) rather than the seemingly multifaceted college counseling he was receiving in school through his classes, teachers, peers, and programmatic opportunities. During the spring of his senior year, when we sat down for the interview, this college messaging seemed to saturate school life. Will alludes to this in comparing Santiago to his Catholic elementary school:

> It was very different, very different . . . Coming from Catholic school, we had rules and we had a uniform and all that
> kind of stuff, but it was *more* strict . . . In Catholic school, I mean, you have a family kind of thing. Everyone knows
> everyone but [here] it's—everyone's working towards college. It's more on a serious level. And little things really count as
> like big things. Like an un-tucked shirt counts as a demerit, and it could lead to detention. And detention can culminate
> to a suspension so it really—it was a really big change for me . . . from the first day actually, whatever we do here, it is
> college prep.

To Will, the social support available from others felt narrow and limited because of the intensity of the college focus and presumed judgment and
sanctions that accompanied what they experienced as academic-specific support. At no point during did Will mention or acknowledge any praise,
encouragement, or positive reinforcement from teachers or school peers during his time at Santiago, something that most interviewees readily
volunteered.

Low School Regard: Peers Only

Rosario Guzmán transferred into Santiago after getting off the waitlist at the end of her freshman year. Then a rising senior, she compared her
academic experience at her first school, a residentially assigned neighborhood high school, with that at Santiago:

> Here . . . the teachers were more aware of their surroundings and what was going on. If you were slacking off, then they
> got on top of you. Like, "You know what—I'm here at school. Come see me. I'm here to help you." That was the
> difference from here to there [her first high school], because over there, it was like, if you're failing, that's your fault.
> You've got to pick yourself back up.

She reported seeing a "big improvement" in her grades, from Cs and Ds to getting As and Bs. Rosario noted:

> I'm . . . keeping up with my homework. I even stay after school in the [peer tutoring program] to get help on my
> homework. I like the fact that they do have that program, because it's people here helping you—other students helping
> you, trying to help you do your work. And I like the fact that teachers are always available . . . If they're not available
> after school, then you could talk to them in the morning the next day.

In this account, Rosario relayed her perception that Santiago teachers believed that she could do better, and recounted the direct support that she
perceived from her teachers.

In the same interview, she noted that she did not feel close with her peers at school. While she acknowledged the value of peer tutoring on her
homework, Rosario spent most of her afternoons either with family or volunteering at a local community center. Although I witnessed the affection
several of her peers had for her, she described herself as more of a loner.

> Rosario: Because of the neighborhood that I live in—it's not bad, but it's not that great either, (*Pause*) I stayed inside most of the
> time. And I keep in touch with some of my friends, that they go to [my old school] and we go out, once in a while, but (*pause*) I
> don't have much friends outside of the school. I try to keep my friends to a certain level because, it's like, I don't like too much
> drama. I don't like to be in, you know, the scene, you know, it's like, if you have problems, I'll try to help you, but if it goes to a
> certain level, then I'm just gonna back off. So that's how I am with that.

She spoke with the author a year and a half later at a Santiago alumni reunion. Although she did not initially anticipate being able to go away to
college, Rosario later applied to and enrolled in a highly selective college within a half-day drive from home; she transferred to a smaller
moderately selective local college later that year. Rosario explained this move as being necessary in order to meet her familial and financial
obligations; she could not make money at a job, pay for housing, help her family, and go to school so far from home. By the end of that year,
Rosario was no longer enrolled in university.

Evelyn Santos serves as another example of a student who felt less connected and valued by school peers. She did not enroll in any college until
several months after graduation, despite having a grandparent who attended college, attending a magnet elementary school, and being on the
highest academic track. Family stress during her senior year resulted in inconsistent attendance. The school week rotates between A day (tracked)
and B day (untracked) course schedules. Evelyn determined that her peers in the highest academic track were less empathetic than her
neighborhood and lower academic track school peers (who she sees in her B day classes), perhaps because they were absorbed in the stress of
schoolwork.

> I guess sometimes people are just too smart for their own good and they don't know how to relax. It's just like relax, you know,
> just relax . . . I'll have issues sometimes like family problems and . . . people in my A day classes just annoy me so much because
> they'll be like wow, you showed up today, Evelyn. That's nice. But people in my B day classes, they'll be like, are you okay,
> Evelyn? You know? . . . I mean, when you're in a higher tier, you know, you're more, you're more worried about your grades, and
> you know, more worried about the work. You know, because the work is harder. And sometimes the kids that normally will get
> something the first time around, sometimes they're so stressed out that you'll need to teach them a few times because their mind
> isn't functioning well. And then like, in my A day classes, I guess the kids, they weren't the kids that I would hang out with outside
> of school because they would stress me out [when] was having a good day.

Although the author observed some school peers and school adults reaching out to her with concern and support during this time, Evelyn did not
experience this support consistently. In fact, she reported strong feelings of "stress" from peers in her advanced-level classes whom she perceived
as not having high regard for her or, in her words, looking at her "like [she is] ridiculous." This lack of regard from academically focused peers was
her primary explanation for her decision to work and attend a community college until her family life becomes more "stable" rather than enroll in a
competitive four-year college.

The majority of Santiago students interviewed cited at least one advocate in the school who they felt believed in them and helped them persevere,
whether it was a peer, a teacher or counselor, or a combination of one or more of these. Survey results about students' perceptions of teachers'
beliefs about them reinforced this finding. Figure 3 shows the association between school regard (from teachers) and Santiago students'
postsecondary transition outcomes, specifically leaving Santiago before graduation, graduating but not continuing on to college, and matriculating in
postsecondary institutions. For those students who did transition to college, the analysis also indicates the academic selectivity of the schools that
were attended. As noted earlier, these items were in the SELS: 2006 survey and are used here as an approximation of school regard. Limitations
aside, these results show that students who went on to college had a greater tendency to perceive positive school regard from their teachers: here,
measured as being viewed as organized, important, successful, intelligent, and deserving of success. These perceptions have consequences.

Figure 3. Mean of School Regard (Teachers') in 10th Grade by 1st College Institution's Barron's Admissions Competitiveness Index Rank
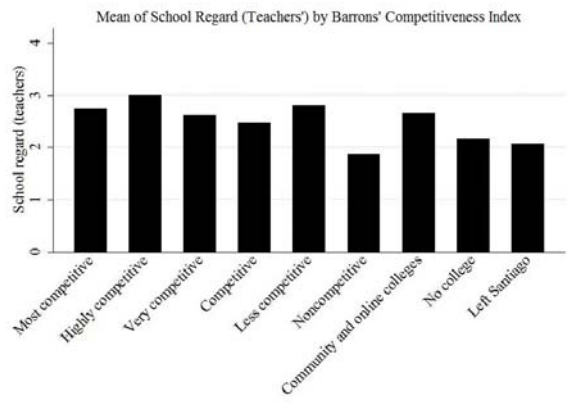
IMPLICATIONS

Most students at Santiago encountered at Santiago experienced least one major obstacle that could have deterred them from their college ambitions. These stressful events can and do intervene in young people's academic success, contributing significantly to the persistent underrepresentation of underrepresented and low-SES youth in higher education. For students encountering such vulnerable periods which could take them off the pipeline to college degree attainment, feeling that they have a close ally who thinks they are intelligent, capable, and worthy of pursuing and realizing their college ambition can be a crucial factor in keeping them on their trajectory.

This case study unpacks students' interpretations of a social context to which some school choice programs aspire, with structures purposed to foster the development of academically and personally supportive relationships between the mostly underrepresented minority students and mostly white teachers in an urban charter school. In theory, these traditionally underrepresented youth should benefit from this school-based social capital in their preparation for and transition to college. The close relationships which students develop with teachers and with each other, both within and across class years, may facilitate the shared expectations, norms, and goals that can foster student achievement in functional communities, as has been found in studies of Catholic schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Morgan & Sørensen, 1999).

Santiago's predominantly Latino, working class students encounter a range of postsecondary transition outcomes, independent of prior academic preparation. For this reason, it serves as an intriguing case for studying how students' experience of their school social context affects their transitions to college. The choice process facilitates the matching of underrepresented students to a school in which many of the school staff share their high ambitions, or the ambitions of their families. Even within such an environment of aligned ambitions however (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999), they experience this context differently.

Implications for Theory

Burnout. Underrepresented minority students navigate particular challenges both at home and at school on the path to college. Many students struggled considerably, even if they came into the school with relatively high levels of skills, motivation, and preparation for college preparatory work. It is for this reason that Santiago's would-be first generation college students (many of whom attend underperforming public elementary schools) needed to expend a great deal of effort to realize their college dreams. This endeavor involves not only their personal academic engagement but also the support of a number of actors—including their families, their peers, their teachers, and other adults at school. This finding runs counter to the narrative that engagement and effort in school are no longer necessary in the age of college access (see also Domina et al., 2011b). Given the potential reported here for Santiago students to struggle with burnout in response to the heavy workload in conjunction with these other nonacademic stressors, it is notable that a national study of Finnish schools found that that positive school climate appears to inhibit adolescents' experience of burnout (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikäinen, & Jokela, 2008).

School regard. Double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) and ethnic regard (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009) explain the processes by which negative societal perceptions of one's ethnic group can inhibit individuals' self-worth. Cooley's (1902) theory of the looking-glass self similarly reminds us that society influences individuals' self-concept. Whether examining individuals in general or underrepresented minority youth in particular, these models focus on how collective individuals influence the self, without prioritizing among them. Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) argue that significant others influence young people's educational attainment: specifically, students' parents' and teachers' encouragement for college, and their friends' college plans.

This case study's findings demonstrate that expectations for college are insufficient in comparison to showing belief in an individual students' potential to be successful in college. In the age of nonselective schools and heavy saturation of procollege expectations for talented minority students, even carefully constructed school structures to promote college going (such as Santiago's) are not necessarily enough to promote actual transitions to college. Underrepresented students—low-income students in particular—are vulnerable to the stressors they encounter as high school students, and expect to continue to face in college. School regard may mitigate the effects of these obstacles. When students perceive that their teachers and peers value them and hold their potential for school success in high esteem, they appear to be more resilient and successful in transitioning to college.

The appendix discussion of Table A2 discusses and demonstrates an alternative operationalization of school regard, using the nationally representative ELS: 2002 dataset. In the interest of presenting clear results, the table shows correlations at the item level rather than the construct level.[10] These results suggest that while there is a relationship, school regard is a distinct construct, with the potential to explain variation in underrepresented students' educational attainment, beyond this case study and schools with similar profiles. Should large-scale studies produce similar findings as those reported here, it may be appropriate to return to smaller scale case studies of differently organized schools to examine more directly and deeply how students develop these beliefs about what others think of their potential, and how school organizations alternately foster or inhibit these subjective experiences.

Peer effects. The organizational structure of the urban charter school in this study considered the importance of students' access to and relationships with teachers. For underrepresented minority youth, teachers' regard for them can take on an emotive quality with particular salience and power. Other research has noted the similar power of the absence of care on the part of teachers (Valenzuela, 1999). Intriguingly, this study finds that school peers are similarly important.

Implications for Policy

In exploring the relationship between a school's social context and the postsecondary transitions of high aspiring underrepresented minority students, this case study suggests the value of social contexts that lead students to internalize others' belief in their potential success. School regard appears to help sustain students' aspirations through the obstacles they encounter in high school and beyond. This concept may be a helpful lens for better assessing the effectiveness of school reforms and programs targeting traditionally underrepresented and underperforming students.

Scholars and practitioners of school reform would benefit from attention to the points raised in this manuscript. Importantly, there tends to be insufficient attention to how to improve resilience to the nonacademic obstacles that hinder underrepresented youth's success in school, in favor of more traditional academic reforms. While research on burnout tends not to focus on schools attended by underrepresented students, this manuscript suggests that interventions to help students achieve a more positive school-life balance and cope with academic stress are of special importance to keep students on track for successful transitions to college.

In efforts to improve school effectiveness, a recent study has identified the importance of personalization for academic and socio-emotional learning (PASL) in schools (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, & Smith, 2013). This promising approach builds on empirical and theoretical evidence to encourage and assist schools in promoting personal connections to school among students, a mutually shared academic environment, and socio-emotional competence among students and school adults. It is important that these efforts do not overlook the potential to build on the school-level strengths that would emerge from successful implementation, to develop robust support networks among school peers.

Moreover, attempts to evaluate school effectiveness may problematically underemphasize students' interpretation of these reform efforts. This study suggests that students' *perceptions* of their school context—specifically here, teachers' and peers' regard for their potential to be successful in school and beyond—would be a more accurate measure of the efficacy of personalization-oriented approaches than a seemingly more objective emphasis on the reform-oriented activities organized within the school.

Limitations

This study cannot answer whether school regard has a sustained impact on underrepresented students' persistence toward a college degree, nor does it examine the degree to which the school regard framework translates to the national population. Despite concerted efforts, there were also more revealing narratives from girls than from boys. This is likely in part because of the author's gender as well as because the academic club with which she volunteered had a disproportionate representation of young women, who came to know her over a longer and more sustained period. For both reasons, there are more detailed, revelatory quotes from girls. That does not mean that boys are not experiencing the same challenges. Rather, recent studies on the new gender gap in schools suggest that boys are probably experiencing the same struggles as the girls, if not more acutely (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). These limitations notwithstanding, the Santiago study highlights the important role of (1) students' experience of social supports in distinction to the availability of the support itself and (2) school regard's specific role in improving students' persistence to postsecondary education, in particular in the face of academic, familial, and personal challenges to students' realization of their college ambitions.

Summary

Study findings underscore the importance of relationships between school actors, specifically, school regard from teachers and peers. The findings reported in this study explain the individual effects of regard from teachers and peers, and suggest that regard among student peers can be fostered by the directed actions of teachers. School regard from teachers alone, however, appears insufficient to help vulnerable students through the transition to postsecondary education. Whether school regard from teachers and peers have differential effects, and how those effects interact, may be determined by future research.

Notes

Underrepresented minorities refer to racial–ethnic minority groups who are underrepresented in higher education. In this article, this term primarily refers to Latino and African American youth.

[2] Access to these opportunities can also be limited by racial biases from the teachers and counselors who recommend students into these opportunities (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) and by the lower tendency of disadvantaged parents to lobby teachers and administrators for advantages for their children (Lareau, 2000; McGhee Hassrick & Schneider, 2009).

[3] Summer respondents studied from late June through August 2005 included both students attending summer school to receive credit for failed academic year courses and those attending for academic enrichment/track promotion.

[4] Difficulties include problems with basic reading and mathematics.

[5] While enrollment by lottery rather than academic criteria does not remove the resulting selection effect, Cullen, Jacob, and Levitt argue that the emphasis on school choice in the Chicago Public School system means that those who opt out of education by assignment are not unlike those who do not (2005).

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Questions Posed to Student Respondents by Category of Reference

	Focal Category of Reference				
Interview Questions	Self	Open or Other Reference Category	Family / Home	Friends	Teachers/school adults
1. Student background (general)	How old are you? What grade are you in? Do you participate in any religious or youth groups? How long is your commute to school each morning?		What neighborhood do you live in? Has your family lived there a long time? How long has your family been in the U.S.? What is your family's background? Do you have any brothers or sisters? How old are they? Where do they go to school? Who lives with you now?		
2. Prior educational experiences	What schools did you attend prior to Santiago—middle school, elementary, other high schools? Did you attend any specialized or magnet programs before coming to Santiago?		Have any members of your family been to or graduated from college?		
3. Comparison with other schools	Other than Santiago, did you apply to any other schools?	Whose decision was it to find out more about Santiago?		Do you have friends at your local neighborhood high school? *[If so:]* What do they tell you about the school?	

Table A1. Questions Posed to Student Respondents by Category of Reference (continued)

	Focal Category of Reference				
Interview Questions	Self	Open or Other Reference Category	Family / Home	Friends	Teachers/school adults
4. Subjective orientations toward Santiago School	What were your first impressions of Santiago? You have been here for X years. How has it been? Are you involved in clubs or organizations here at school? Which ones?	How do you spend your free time during the week and weekends? *[Probe if needed: with friends, at family, at home?]*		How did you make the friends you have at Santiago? *[Probe if needed: sports, classes, advisory?]* Students come from all different neighborhoods. Is it difficult to hang out outside of school? Where do you tend to hang out with your friends? What neighborhood *[central to school or closer to home]*? At their homes? At your home?	*[If not already discussed]:* Are there any teachers or staff members that have been particularly helpful in some way?
5. Academics and academic management at Santiago	How much time do you spend on homework each day during the school year? What are your grades like normally? *For those interviewed during summer school program:* What are you in summer school for—(making up a class, enrichment, or both)? What are you doing for the rest of the summer? *If working*: Do you work during the school year, too? Where do you work? How many hours?				

Table A1. Questions Posed to Student Respondents by Category of Reference (continued)

	Focal Category of Reference				
Interview Questions	Self	Open or Other Reference Category	Family / Home	Friends	Teachers/school adults
6. Ethnic and racial identity	How do you primarily identify yourself when asked about your ethnic or racial background? What does being [ethnic group] mean to you? You are attending a primarily Latino high school for students pursuing college. How does your identity relate to your experiences at Santiago?		*If visiting extended family over the summer*: How often do you see them? *If referred to a specific place:* When is the last time you visited X (e.g., Puerto Rico)?	How would you describe your friends' racial and ethnic backgrounds? When making friends, do you consider having a common cultural heritage to be important?	
7. Future plans	What do you plan on doing after Santiago? Have you given much thought to college? It might change, but for now, what would you like to pursue in your career? What would you like to see in your future in the next five or ten years?	How did you come to think about X career idea? Have you had any role models in your life? Who have they been? What kind of advice have you received about college and your future - from family, friends? How does this advice compare to what you have heard at Santiago?	What do you think your parents' expect that you will do after high school?		

Table A1. Questions Posed to Student Respondents by Category of Reference (continued)

	Focal Category of Reference				
Interview Questions	Self	Open or Other Reference Category	Family / Home	Friends	Teachers/school adults
8. Response to obstacles	What do you see as the biggest obstacles to achieving your college and career goals? [*Probe about family resources and citizenship if not already discussed*]. What kind of resources do you see yourself as having to overcome these obstacles?	How do you think that the issues or obstacles that you face compare to those of other Latino/African American youth in			

		the U.S.? Do you see any particular challenges for [*their ethnic group*] youth?
9. Transition to college	How does your identity play into your thoughts about what kind of college you would like to attend? How comfortable would you feel attending a college that has a small Latino/African American population? Why? *[If have not yet applied:]* Do you have any ideas about what where you would like to apply to college? *[If have applied]*: Where did you apply to college? Could you tell me about the application process?	How far away would you be willing to go for college? Are you planning to leave Illinois for college? What makes you want to stay/go?

Table A2. Bivariate Correlations between School Regard Items and Associated Constructs and Outcomes

School regard items	Math teacher's expectations	English teacher's expectations	Grade point average (GPA)	Math course sequence completion	Weekly math homework hours	Behavioral engagement	Educational expectations	Self-efficacy
Students' perceptions of classroom actors								
Feels 'put down' in class by teacher	0.16 ***	-0.14 ***	0.15 ***	0.13 ***	0.01	0.11 ***	0.11 ***	0.15 ***
Feels 'put down' in class by students	0.09 ***	-0.09 ***	0.05 ***	0.10 ***	0.01	0.06 ***	0.06 ***	0.13 ***
Students' perceptions of schools' teachers								
Teachers praise effort	0.09 ***	0.09 ***	0.08 ***	0.07 ***	0.06 ***	0.06 ***	0.10 ***	0.18 ***
Interested in students	0.17 ***	0.16 ***	0.16 ***	0.13 ***	0.07 ***	0.10 ***	0.13 ***	0.18 ***

Source. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002).

Note. Data are weighted to population means, using the second follow up base year panel weight. Unweighted analyses yielded similar results. Self-efficacy is the mean of the following items: "can learn something really hard," "can get no bad grades if decides to," and "can learn something well if wants to." Educational expectations and teachers' expectations for R are both coded such that 1 = less than high school graduation and 8 = doctorate or advanced degree. The behavioral engagement is based on reverse codes of student-reported items about their frequency of coming to class without writing materials, books, and homework.

$* \, p < 0.05, \, ** \, p < .01, \, *** \, p < .001.$

Table A3. Selections from interview codes on response to challenges, *R = Sonia Bermudez*

Sonia Bermudez—12th grade respondent, interviewed in spring of her senior year. Sonia lives with mother and two younger brothers. She attended a magnet elementary school before Santiago.

Sonia: When I came in, I wasn't an A/B student. I was really like a C student. And so, coming in freshman year, the way they teach you, they train your mind, you kind of get into this mindset . . . So basically, what Santiago has done is they won't let you settle for just average. Sometimes you have to though if you are really struggling. But they won't—they want you to know that there is something better. That's what they make you strive for . . . I am going to be a neurosurgeon . . .

I: Do you feel like there have been any particular pressures you need to struggle against to get to where you are or where you're going *[referred to earlier in the interview]*?

Sonia: Well, junior year I had a lot of problems. It was a breaking point I guess with my family. I guess I lost touch with them. I was always edgy and moody. And I guess I had a lot of downfall at home. And it reflected in my school work, where I felt like didn't want to do it anymore. And I guess your brain is just like at a point it says, like, no more. But I had to really pull myself together that year. I mean, I salvaged what I had academically to Bs and some As and Cs. And I'm still paying for it this year. I mean, I'm so happy I got into [*highly competitive colleges*], but that junior year dropped my GPA really bad, and you could see it in my face that I was struggling, and I was always tired and there was something wrong. So for me to come back from that and go to college and career and do what I have to do *(pause)*, it was really hard for me to come up from that.

I: Do you feel like the struggle came from academics and then your family and then circled back?

Sonia: It was that and also money problems. And I guess I also really needed a father and he wasn't there, like physically, when I needed him. And so I was giving up and falling into this cycle of failure, and so I had to snap back in. I met my best friend that year and she like really helped me get back with my family, and I guess she was a strong figure for me . . .

I: Was there anyone else?

Sonia: Ms. Martinez. I guess that's why I call her my second mother. I remember, I never really emotionally cry, but I remember one day I just broke down crying because it was so hard, and I couldn't. My gym [class] was failing and my grades were dropping, and she just sat there and we planned my schedule for the rest of the year so that I could still graduate and be a senior this year. So I got up from it and she was right there with me . . .

Codes generated from Atlas.Ti software program:

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:2 [Sonia: When I came in, I wasn'..] (3:3)   (Super)
Codes: [grades - Family: academic] [school support]
Sonia: When I came in, I wasn't an A/B student. I was really like a C student. And so, coming in freshman year, the way they teach you, they train your mind, you kind of get into this mindset…. So basically, what Santiago has done is they won't let you settle for just average. Sometimes you have to though if you are really struggling. But they won't – they want you to know that there is something better. That's what they make you strive for . . . I am going to be a neurosurgeon . . .

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:3 [Well, junior year I had a lot ..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [burnout] [family - Family: family] [grades - Family: academic] [home - Family: family]
Well, junior year I had a lot of problems. It was a breaking point I guess with my family. I guess I lost touch with them. I was always edgy and moody. And I guess I had a lot of downfall at home. And it reflected in my school work, where I felt like didn't want to do it anymore. And I guess your brain is just like at a point it says, like, no more.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:4 [But I had to really pull mysel..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [resilience]
But I had to really pull myself together that year. I mean, I salvaged what I had academically to Bs and some As and Cs. And I'm still paying for it this year. I mean, I'm so happy I got into [*highly competitive colleges*], but that junior year dropped my GPA really bad, and you could see it in my face that I was struggling, and I was always tired and there was something wrong. So for me to come back from that and go to college and career and do what I have to do *(pause)*, it was really hard for me to come up from that.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:5 [I salvaged what I had academic..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [grades - Family: academic]
I salvaged what I had academically to Bs and some As and Cs. And I'm still paying for it this year. I mean, I'm so happy I got into [*highly competitive colleges*], but that junior year dropped my GPA really bad

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:6 [you could see it in my face th..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [burnout] [challenge] [struggle]
you could see it in my face that I was struggling, and I was always tired and there was something wrong.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:7 [I am going to be a neurosurgeo..] (3:3)   (Super)
Codes: [career goals] [occupational aspirations]
I am going to be a neurosurgeon . . .

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:8 [But they won't – they want you..] (3:3)   (Super)
Codes: [institutional context] [school culture] [school expectations]
But they won't – they want you to know that there is something better. That's what they make you strive for…

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:9 [coming in freshman year, the w..] (3:3)   (Super)
Codes: [indoctrination]
coming in freshman year, the way they teach you, they train your mind, you kind of get into this mindset . . . So basically, what Santiago has done is they won't let you settle for just average.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:10 [When I came in, I wasn't an A/..] (3:3)   (Super)
Codes: [academic self-concept]
When I came in, I wasn't an A/B student. I was really like a C student.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:11 [And I guess your brain is just..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [wants to quit]
And I guess your brain is just like at a point it says, like, no more.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:12 [go to college and career and d..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: ["have" to do] [career goals]
go to college and career and do what I have to do

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:14 [it was really hard for me to c..] (5:5)   (Super)
Codes: [challenge] [struggle]
it was really hard for me to come up from that.

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:15 [money problems] (7:7)   (Super)
Codes: [challenge] [family - Family: family] [financial - Families (2): family, stress] [problem - Family: stress]
money problems

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:16 [really needed a father and he ..] (7:7)   (Super)
Codes: [challenge] [family - Family: family] [father - Family: family] [stress - Family: stress]
really needed a father and he wasn't there, like physically, when I needed him

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:17 [I was giving up and falling in..] (7:7)   (Super)
Codes: [burnout] [stress - Family: stress] [wants to quit]
I was giving up and falling into this cycle of failure,

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:19 [so I had to snap back in] (7:7)   (Super)
Codes: ["have" to do] [resilience] [school expectations]
so I had to snap back in

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:21 [best friend that year and she ..] (7:7)   (Super)
Codes: [friend - Family: peer] [family - Family: family] [friend - Family: peer] [role model - peer] [support - Family: support]
best friend that year and she like really helped me get back with my family, and I guess she was a strong figure for me

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:22 [Ms. Martinez. I guess that's w..] (9:9)   (Super)
Codes: [school support] [teacher as parent]
Ms. Martinez. I guess that's why I call her my second mother

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:23 [I never really emotionally cry..] (9:9)   (Super)
Codes: [burnout] [challenge] [stress - Family: stress] [struggle]
I never really emotionally cry, but I remember one day I just broke down crying because it was so hard

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:24 [My gym [class] was failing and..] (9:9)   (Super)
Codes: [GPA - Family: academic] [grades - Family: academic]
My gym [class] was failing and my grades were dropping

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:25 [So I got up from it and she wa..] (9:9)   (Super)
Codes: [resilience] [school regard]
So I got up from it and she was right there with me...

P 2: appendix table A3 - 2:26 [she just sat there and we plan..] (9:9)   (Super)
Codes: [school support] [support - Family: support] [teacher - Family: teacher] [teacher effort]
she just sat there and we planned my schedule for the rest of the year so that I could still graduate and be a senior this year.

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