

“This School is my Sanctuary”:  
*The Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos  
Alternative High School*

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is threefold: 1) to describe the history and mission of the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School (PACHS) in Chicago; 2) to highlight students' voices and their descriptions of the “school as sanctuary” concept; and 3) to describe teachers' experiences of maintaining the high school as a sanctuary for its students. The study employs analysis of school-related historical and curricular documents and semi-structured one-on-one interviews with eight participants who were involved with the school as students, alumnus or teachers. Although the school was initially founded as a site of Puerto Rican pedagogical resistance, it now fulfills the affective and cultural needs of its many Puerto Rican, Mexican and African-American students. All students interviewed, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, expressed the school-as-sanctuary concept through four characteristics they felt were important concerning their PACHS experiences. First, teachers established caring relations with students by offering them mentorship, counseling and holding them to high academic expectations. In turn, students reciprocated this care by stating their desire to give back to their communities. Second, the high school's familial-type environment was important to the students because it provided them more opportunities to form academic and personal support networks with peers, which contributed to their “sense of belonging” in school. Third, students were appreciative of the high school's gang-free safe space. Fourth, the high school's curriculum was structured to encourage students to explore, discover, celebrate and affirm their respective racial and ethnic realities within and outside school.