

Where are the academically successful Puerto Rican students? Five Success Factors of High Achieving Puerto Rican High School Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to describe the five success factors that ten low-income, urban Puerto Rican high school students attributed to their high academic achievement. These success factors are: 1) the acquisition of social capital and academic motivation through religiosity and participation in school and community-based extracurricular activities; 2) student affirmation of Puerto Rican identity; 3) the influence of mothers; 4) the potential for caring teachers to influence high academic achievement; and 5) membership in multicultural/multilingual peer networks. Additionally, these success factors and their implications for Latina/o education are discussed.

Many of the students in the study credit their high academic achievement to their involvement with a Catholic or Pentecostal-based religious institution and/or other kinds of extracurricular activities. These activities also furthered the establishment of community/social networks that facilitated their access to resources like homework help and mentorship. All the high achieving students in this study strongly affirmed their Puerto Rican identity by expressing they were proud to be “Boricua” or “Puertorriqueña/o,” and that their peers also viewed them as being Puerto Rican. This ethnic affirmation challenges the belief held by some researchers who contend that being a good student from an involuntary migrant group is ultimately perceived by other students of color as “acting White.”