

“Nobody is listening to us”: Latinx immigrant youth perspectives on race, discrimination, belonging and racial equity in schools

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Research Briefing: The Power of Belonging panel for First Focus on Children
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Background

- 10.5 million (2021) undocumented migrants in U.S.
- 18 million children in the US with at least one immigrant parent growing up in an era of anti-immigrant sentiment, targeted hostility, and symbolic/structural/legal violence
- Face educational and bureaucratic neglect, and surveillance (Grace & Roth, 2020; Rodriguez et al, 2022)
- Barriers to educational and social resources and mobility

Immigrant youth...

- Migrate -with and without families
- Enter Office of Refugee Resettlement (even if they are not refugees) and receive services and work with ORR to be placed with family or sponsors
- Many districts have little information or contact with ORR; limited communication across federal, state, and local agencies
- Schools lack capacity, personnel and knowledge about the population
- Schools are often understaffed and manage the influx of newcomers
 - 100s in some districts in the mid-Atlantic (MD, PA, NJ for example)

*Terms and services vary => built in inequities in the system

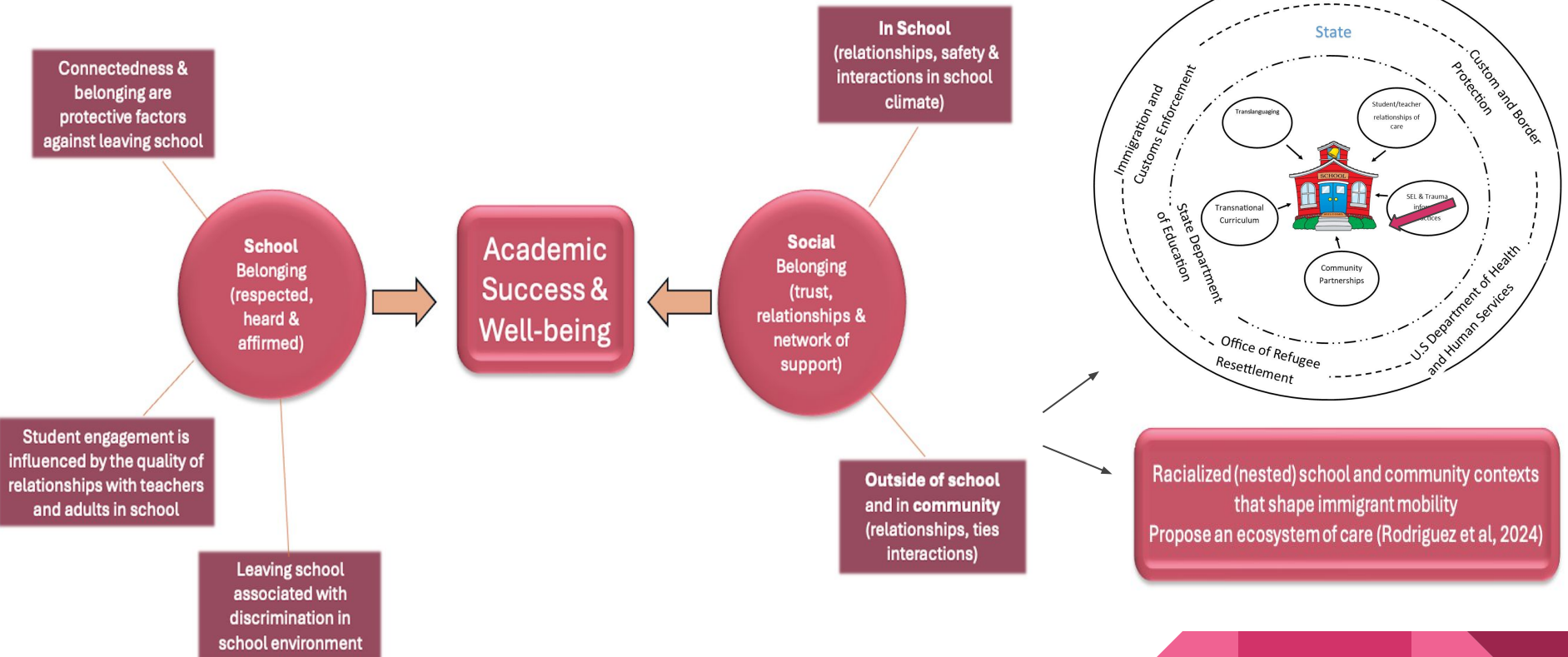
Term	Definition
Asylum Seeker	Any person who arrives in the United States through a port of entry, or who is already physically present in the United States, who meets the requirements determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security or the Attorney General under this section if the Secretary of Homeland Security or the Attorney General, and applies for asylum.
Newcomer	A person who was not born in the United States and has recently arrived to the country; the term is often used to refer to a broad category of immigrants such as asylum-seeking children, immigrant children and youth, English language learners, unaccompanied youth, etc.
Refugee	Any person who is outside of their national country-or for someone who has no national country, the country of most habitual residence- who is unable or unwilling to return to that country for persecution or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion
Unaccompanied	A child who— (A) has no lawful immigration status in the United States; (B) is under 18 years of age; and (C) has no parent or legal guardian in the United States; or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody.
Undocumented	A person who resides in the United States without legal status, including but not limited to people who entered the country without inspection, entered with legal status and overstayed their visa, individuals who have or have had Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), are currently in the process of legalizing their status, and other vulnerable immigrants.

From (Rodriguez, Lopez-Escobar, & Murillo, 2024)

<https://www.tcpres.com/teaching-and-learning-in-the-new-latino-diaspora-9780807767306>

Research Says...

I add...(Rodriguez et al, 2024)



Research Methods



High-Level Snapshot (N=2310 Kids)

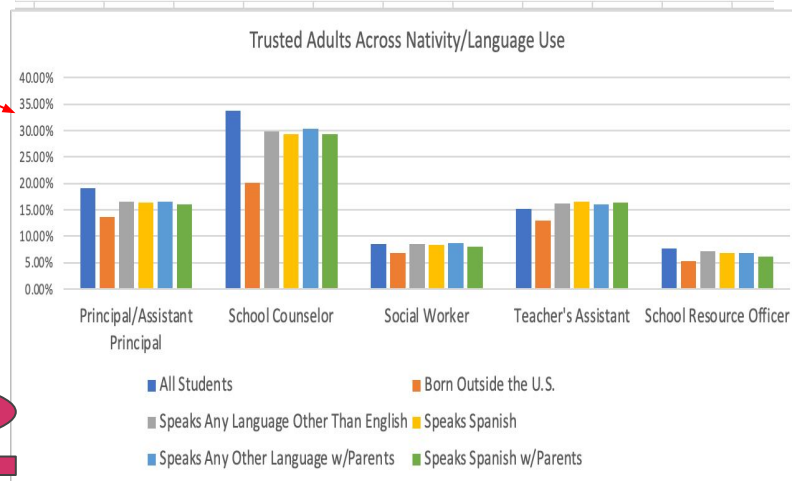
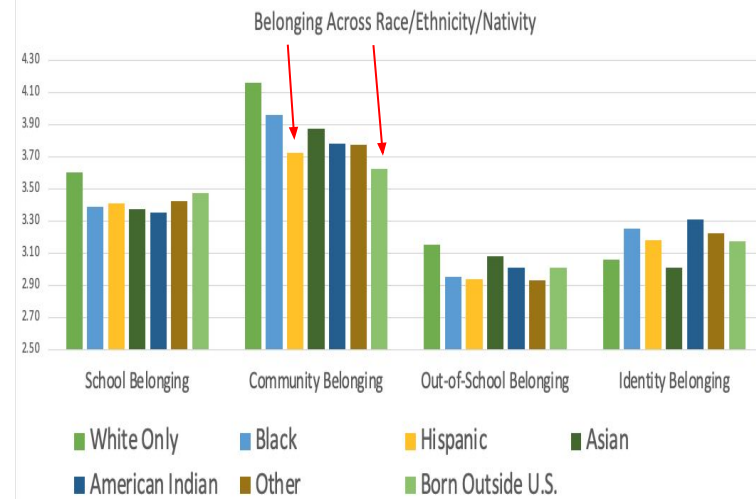
Findings Part I: Belonging across full sample

Minoritized students reported lower school, community, and out-of-school belonging. Hispanic youth and youth born outside of the U.S. reported lower community belonging and out of school belonging

Findings Part II: Trusted adult responses

Hispanic, Spanish speakers, and those born outside of the U.S. tended to be less likely to report trust in adults at school. Overall, students were most likely to report trust in the school counselor.

Students responded on a scale from 1-5 where higher scores indicate greater agreement with positive belonging statements and lower scores indicate disagreement.



Results from Open-Ended Responses (N=1655)

Lack of belonging in school

“Even though there are rules against racial discrimination me and multiple others feel less supported than we should because we have encountered multiple racist situations either in front of teachers or we have been in a situation and went to a teacher for help, [and] we have not gotten the help we needed.”

“I feel very excluded from all school events and community related things. I just dont feel special or accepted. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because of my skin, looks, or personality but people don't talk to me”

BLOG POST

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Immigration and U.S. Public Schools

As U.S. schools grow more diverse, districts across the country have initiated racial equity plans to create inclusive environments for all students. I [study](#) how districts manage the influx of newcomer immigrant youth and how they foster school and social belonging. In this work, I locate [racialization](#) (i.e., any process of othering and categorizing groups by race) at the heart of the unequal distribution of resources for immigrant youth, as well as their (often unwelcoming) experiences in schools and communities. To date, few [scholars](#) have interpreted immigration as a racial equity issue and recent [research](#) encourages educators, policy-makers, and researchers to advance race-conscious equity efforts.

Preliminary findings from my current study suggest a misalignment between what school districts say they are doing to advance equity and what Latinx immigrant youth are feeling. Racial equity involves thinking about identity, belonging, power, and the effects of immigration and cultural differences between students and school personnel. So far, my [mixed-methods work](#) has shown that, despite efforts to improve school climate, Latinx immigrant youth have experienced [racial antagonism](#) from other students and a lack of support from school-based personnel, including educators, leaders, and staff. What are the challenges to aligning district efforts and student experiences, and how might districts improve?

Results from Open-Ended Responses (N=1655)

Belonging in ESL classes or community-based after school programs w/ other Latino students

“Because we all come from...but it’s like we had something in common in that we were all Latinos or kids of Latinos. I feel that all of us, even though we had different stories, have gone through adversities, so I feel that connects us.”

Confirms past research that for language learners especially, solidarity and connectedness is felt because they are “all in the same boat” (Rodriguez, 2019; 2020)



Summary of findings

My mixed-methods designed research shows that Latinx immigrant youth have experienced **racial antagonism** from other students and adults in their schools, and **a lack of support from school-based personnel**, including educators, leaders, and staff.

-



My research links challenges of **immigration status and backgrounds** and **(racial) equity issues in schools**

Race & Immigration Status are linked due to processes of othering that occur in society and schools

Recent research encourages educators, policy-makers, and researchers to advance race-conscious equity efforts (Rodriguez, et al, 2024)

Discussion of Findings



- **A lack of belonging** arises when schools do not signal affirmation of Latinx identity or fail to establish trusting relationships between students and adults.
- There is a **misalignment** between what school districts say they are doing to advance equity and what Latinx immigrant youth are feeling.
- Across multiple districts and community-based spaces, youth participants share a range of experiences, from **not being heard** to **not being represented in decision-making or policy**.
- Youth also report **a lack of supportive responses from the school**, further contributing to an unwelcoming environment.

Implications/Recommendations for Policy at multiple levels (school, community, state)



Authentically embedding **Latinx history and culture** in school curriculum and center youth voice / leaders in school board or coalitions



Diversify hiring to reflect demographics in school climate and curriculum.



Address racial incidents and improving relationships in the racial climate of schools.



Raise awareness among school and district personnel to limit superficiality about cultural and racial differences and encourage awareness about immigration as part of antiracist practice



Improve communication across local and state entities, or federal entities when applicable



Racial equity plans across public schools need accountability mechanisms and state and local support

Q&A

For anything presented here, please email for published media, blogs, or publications

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Acknowledgements



William T. Grant Foundation

Publications



Check out my
research on

[ImmigrantEdNext](#)



2023

Activism and Resistance from the Trenches: Crisscrossing Comparison and Undocumented Migrant Experiences in China and the United States



2022

Immigration Enforcement Effects and the Role of School Social Workers Supporting Immigrant Students



2022

School-Based Personnel Advocacy for Undocumented Students Through Collective Leadership in Urban Schools: A Comparative Case Study



2022

"Immigration knocks on the door...We are stuck...": A multi-level analysis of undocumented youths' experiences of racism, system failure, and resistance in policy and school contexts



2022

"Immigration Enforcement Is a Daily Part of Our Students' Lives": School Social Workers' Perceptions of Racialized Nested Contexts of



2021

Crossing Borders: Exploring the Role of School Social Workers in Immigrant-Serving Schools



2020

"I Was Born at the Border, Like the 'Wrong' Side of It": Undocumented Latinx Youth Experiences of Racialization in the U.S. South



2020

School social workers as Nepantleras in equity work for immigrant students: A conceptual exploration

 William T. Grant
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