

NEARLY HALF OF MEXICAN CHILDREN IN NEW YORK CITY ARE GROWING UP POOR.

POLICY BRIEF

YOUNG MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN NEW YORK CITY: WORKING MORE, LEARNING AND EARNING LESS

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By Lazar Treschan & Apurva Mehrotra



The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) is an informed, independent, and unwavering voice for positive action representing low-income New Yorkers. CSS addresses the root causes of economic disparity through research, advocacy, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

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Purpose of the Study

The goal of this project is to examine key trends in the demographics, school and work participation, and household incomes of young people of Mexican origin living in New York City. This study relies primarily on data from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)¹ to analyze these trends and offer hypotheses about their causes, as well as considerations for those who work to improve the lives of this population. The authors hope the findings presented here are useful to policy makers, researchers, funders, and service providers in this field. As much as it may offer some suggestions for policy and investment, the type of broad secondary data analysis that informs this project is often most useful in raising questions for further inquiry and discussion.

There is a growing body of literature on Mexican immigrants in New York City, perhaps most notably Robert Smith's "Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants." Smith's analysis of changes in immigration patterns and social contexts shed considerable light on the collective experience of this population. The following report, based on an analysis of secondary quantitative data, seeks to identify trends related to demography, education, employment, and poverty that will ideally serve as a complement to the more ethnographic approach of Smith, Alyshia Galvez, Hirokazu Yoshikawa and others who have written on the subject. Their work is highly recommended for those seeking a more qualitative analysis of Mexican immigrants to accompany the data presented in this report.

Background

In October 2010, CSS published *Latino Youth in New York City: School, Work, and Income Trends for New York's Largest Group of Young People*, an examination of the school and labor force participation of young people of Hispanic background in New York City. That report found major differences between young people of different Latino nationalities. This project, which focuses on young people of Mexican origin, builds off of that work. The Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation (DBAF) conceived of and commissioned this effort as part of a larger initiative it is engaging in that focuses on young New Yorkers of Mexican origin.

One important note about how our data relates to immigration: the ACS provides what is believed to be very reliable information on whether an individual was born here or abroad (immigration status), but less reliable information about their documentation status. Although individuals are asked if they are citizens, there is reason to believe that their answers may not be fully accurate. As such, this report does not analyze responses as to citizenship, nor does it present analysis of the documentation status of immigrants. The Census Bureau is effective at gathering information in part because it does not delve too deeply into documentation status.

A Note on Terminology

Race and Ethnicity: Using responses to the American Community Survey (ACS), we created separate racial and ethnic groups for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic-blacks, non-Hispanic Asians, and Hispanics. Use of the terms white, black, or Asian, all refer to those who do not identify as Hispanic. Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably.

Nationality: For those who identify as Hispanic, the ACS asks for specific nationality or place of origin, which we use to categorize the various Hispanic subgroups. Individuals of Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Mexican descent are the three largest subgroups of Latinos in New York City. We group all other New Yorkers who identify themselves as Hispanic as Other Latinos. Leading nationalities of Other Latinos include Ecuadorians (193,104), Colombians (92,432), Salvadorans (50,095), and Hondurans (47,774). Use of the term Mexican includes all individuals in New York City who identified as having Mexican ancestry, whether they were born in the United States or abroad. For the purpose of this report, Mexican and Mexican-American may be used interchangeably.

Foreign born versus native born: Those identified as “native born” were born in one of the 50 United States. Those born in Puerto Rico are included in the separate category of born in a United States territory. “Foreign born” includes all of those born outside of the United States and U.S. territories.

Age Groups: This report refers to individuals under age 16 as “children,” those between the ages of 16 through 24 as “youth,” “young adults,” or “young people,” and “adults” as those over age 24.

Outline of the Report

This report begins with an overview of the broad trends among all New Yorkers of Mexican origin before focusing more specifically on Mexican young people. In subsequent sections, we examine school enrollment and educational attainment; labor force participation, employment, and earnings; and household income of young Mexicans in New York City. We then offer some conclusions on how to think about the findings of each section.

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Trends in the Population of New Yorkers of Mexican Origin
- III. General Characteristics of Mexican Youth in New York City
- IV. School Enrollment and Educational Attainment
- V. Employment, Earnings, and Industries
- VI. Household Income and Poverty Levels
- VII. Findings and Implications

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

The dominant themes that emerge from our analysis of data on Mexicans in New York City are that they are a growing population that is increasingly born in the United States, and—as a result of several contributing factors—are more likely to fall into poverty than other groups. The remainder of this report, including the findings listed below, seeks to build on and clarify the dynamics around these emerging trends.

The number of young people of Mexican origin in New York City is growing fast and will likely continue to do so.

The population of Mexican New Yorkers, particularly young people, is increasing rapidly, causing a shift in the broad demographics of this group—The number of young people of Mexican origin in New York City is growing fast and will likely continue to do so. A relatively large share of Mexican New Yorkers is very young: nearly three out of ten Mexicans in the city are under the age of 16, a far greater share than most other ethnic groups. Despite the fact that most Mexican New Yorkers were born overseas, we do see a general shift in the nature of the Mexican population, from one largely comprised of immigrant adults, to one with a large and growing share of young people born in the United States.

Educational outcomes for both foreign- and native-born Mexicans are very poor—Mexican young people born outside the United States have very low rates of school enrollment, but those born here attend school at higher rates than other Latino youth. However, Mexican youth who have already left school—both native and foreign born—have considerably lower levels of educational attainment

than their peers, with over half lacking a high school diploma. Foreign-born Mexicans, in particular, graduate at far lower rates than other immigrant youth. We may be less concerned about the lack of educational attainment among immigrant Mexican young people, particularly those ages 20 through 24, who have come to New York City to work and are less interested in school. But it is harder to rationalize the alarming dropout rate of foreign-born Mexicans who do enroll in New York City public schools, or the growing number of Mexican young people born and raised here who are not succeeding in our schools.

As Mexicans start families here, they fall below the poverty line—Mexicans between the ages of 16 and 24 do not have the highest rates of poverty among Latino groups, but have the largest share that are below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. High rates of employment may keep many Mexicans out of poverty, but their concentration in low-wage jobs often puts them near poverty. The poverty rate for the youngest Mexicans is extremely high, with more than four out of ten Mexicans under the age of 16 living in poverty. Much of this appears to be due to the fact that many Mexican young people initially come here and live neither as dependents nor as head of households, a situation that may be affordable with income from low-wage jobs. But as these individuals settle here and start families, the increased size of their households pushes them below the poverty line. This raises serious concerns about the rapidly growing population of second-generation Mexican youth and their families in New York City.

We identify two major narratives from these trends:

1. High rates of employment may lead some to believe that Mexican immigrants come to the United States to work and not attend school. If true, this narrative represents an increasingly smaller share of Mexicans in New York City, as the population shifts to one that is younger and more likely to be born in the United States. Those who do enroll in full-time education, both native and foreign born, are faring very poorly in our schools. This should raise the alarm.
2. Immigrant Mexicans appear to be having great difficulty making ends meet as they start families here. Incomes that might support one individual on their own or in a shared household are not enough to support a family. As a result, Mexican children being born here have frighteningly high rates of poverty.

Implications for Policy

Several policies would seem to offer a strong chance of impacting the dynamics of Mexican young people. These are described in greater depth in the final section of the report.

- Support for children and families in Mexican communities
- Targeted educational interventions in Mexican communities
- Increasing the minimum wage
- Better workforce development, benefits, and security for low-wage workers

II. Trends in the Population of New Yorkers of Mexican Origin

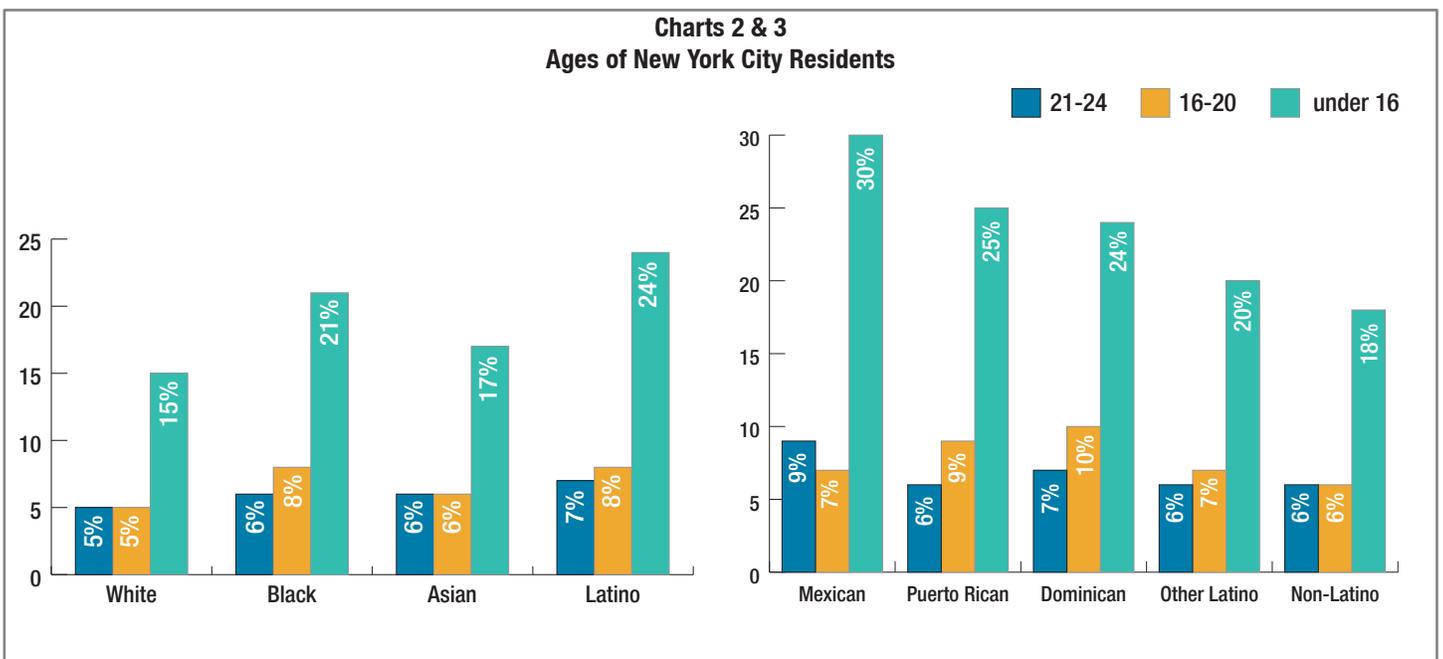
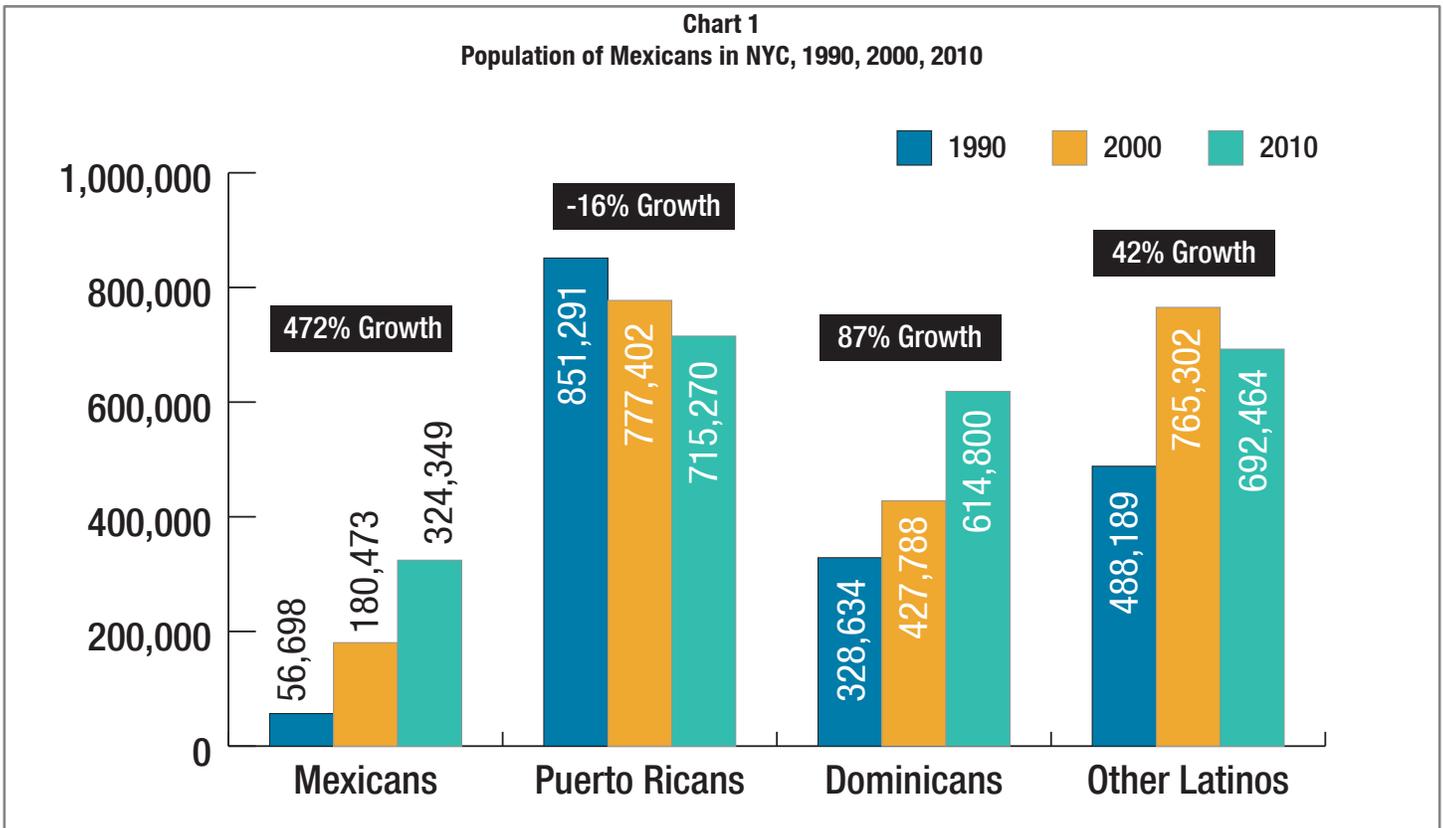
From 1990–2010, the population of New York City grew over 12 percent, from nearly 7.3 million to nearly 8.2 million people. This growth was led primarily by Asians and Latinos, as the white population shrank and the numbers of blacks grew only marginally. In the last 20 years, the populations of Asians and Latinos grew by 110 and 36 percent, respectively. Despite slower growth during that period, Latinos still outnumbered Asians in 2010 by more than a two to one margin, with 2.3 million Latinos and 1.0 million Asians residing in New York City.

Rapid Growth of Mexican New Yorkers

While still a small share of the overall Latino population in New York City, New Yorkers who identify as Mexican are the subgroup that is growing the fastest. There were nearly five times as many Mexicans in New York City in 2010 than in 1990. In 1990, the city was home to 56,698 individuals who identified as Mexican; by 2000, this figure was over 180,000, and nearly 325,000 at the end of 2010.²

Dominicans have also experienced steady and significant growth in the last 20 years, adding more numbers than Mexicans, but at a lower rate. The number of Puerto Ricans in New York City has declined each decade, while the population of Other Latinos grew significantly from 1990 to 2000, but fell from 2000 to 2010.

Latinos are the youngest racial/ethnic group in New York City. Nearly 4 out of 10 Latinos are under the age of 25, with a quarter of the population under age 16. In comparison, 25 percent of whites are under age 25, and just 15 percent under age 16. As the population ages, it is clear that, even without immigration, Latinos will soon become a much larger share of New York City's adult population. As Chart 3 presents, Mexicans are significantly younger than other subgroups of Latinos, and will thus become a larger



share of the future adult population among Latinos. New York City’s future continues to look Latino, and Mexicans are growing in prominence among them.

No racial or ethnic group of significant size in New York City is as young as Mexican New Yorkers. Nearly half (46 percent) of all New Yorkers of Mexican origin are under age 25. Even more strikingly, three out of every ten Mexicans in New York City are under 16 years of age. Forty percent of Puerto Ricans, the largest Latino group, and 41 percent of Dominicans are under age 25.

Increasingly Native Born

The relative youth of the rapidly growing Mexican population likely means that—unless immigration of Mexican adults increases at a rapid rate—greater shares of the future Mexican adult population will have grown up or been born in New York City. This will represent a major shift in the nature of New York’s Mexican population.

No racial or ethnic group of significant size in New York City is as young as Mexican New Yorkers. Nearly half (46 percent) of all New Yorkers of Mexican origin are under age 25.

The tendency toward increasingly native-born Mexicans is also borne out by an examination of gender by age. Whereas older youth (61 percent) and adult Mexicans (59 percent) are much more likely to be male, younger Mexicans show a more even male-female balance. This is due to the fact that a higher percentage of immigrants are male.

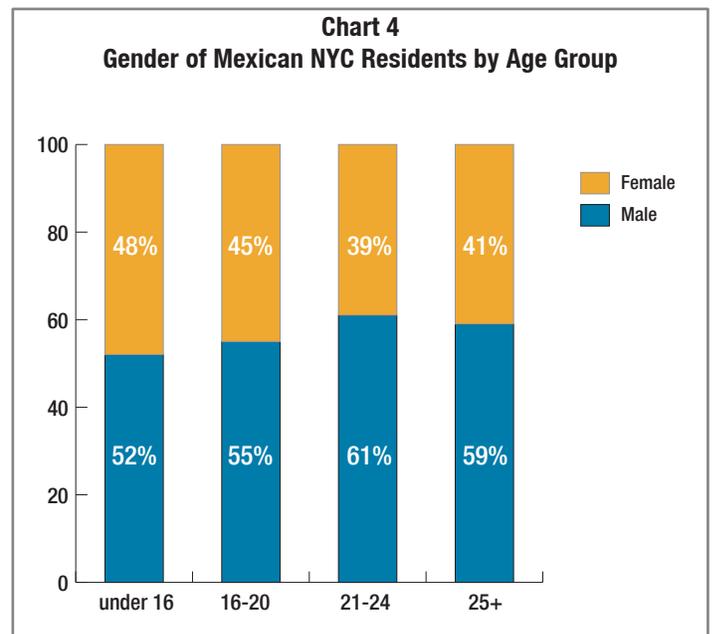
This provides more evidence of a coming demographic shift in the population to one less dominated by adult male

immigrants, toward a more gender-balanced, native-born population.

Mexican Neighborhoods

Mexican New Yorkers are spread out across the city, with concentrations in several neighborhoods. The contiguous neighborhoods in Western Queens from Astoria to Corona, show the largest area of high Mexican population. This reveals a pattern that is somewhat unique to immigrants from Mexico compared to those from other countries. Most immigrant communities tend to settle in poor neighborhoods,³ while many Mexican immigrants initially settle in working- and middle-class neighborhoods in Queens.

The community districts with the greatest numbers of Mexican New Yorkers are Jackson Heights, Sunset Park, and Bushwick, but other areas are also home to significant populations of Mexicans. Washington Heights, East Harlem, Corona, the South Bronx, and Northern Staten Island all show relatively high numbers of Mexicans.



Concentration of Mexicans in NYC Neighborhoods

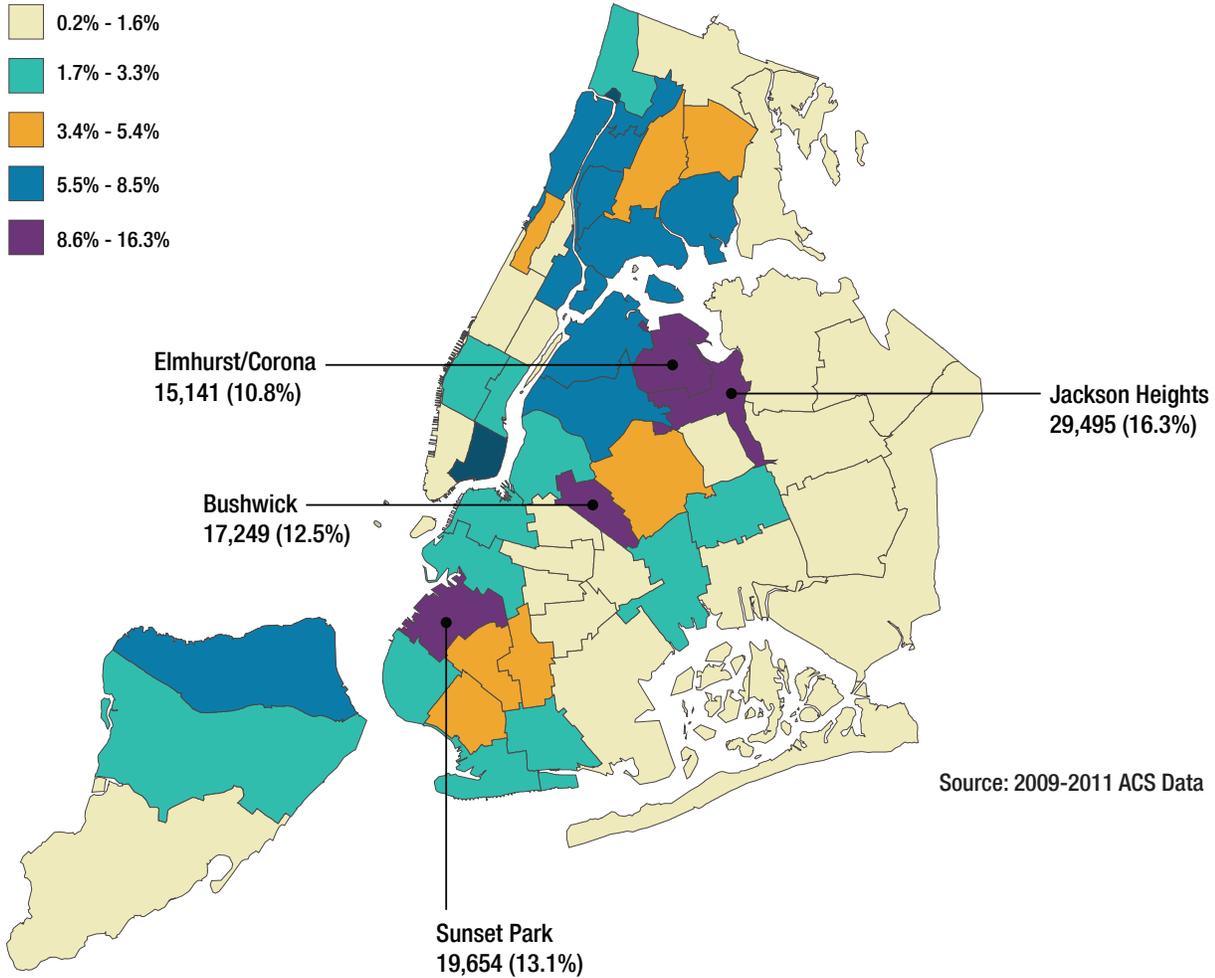


Table 1: Age and Gender Breakdown of Mexicans by Neighborhood (Top Five Most Populous Neighborhoods)

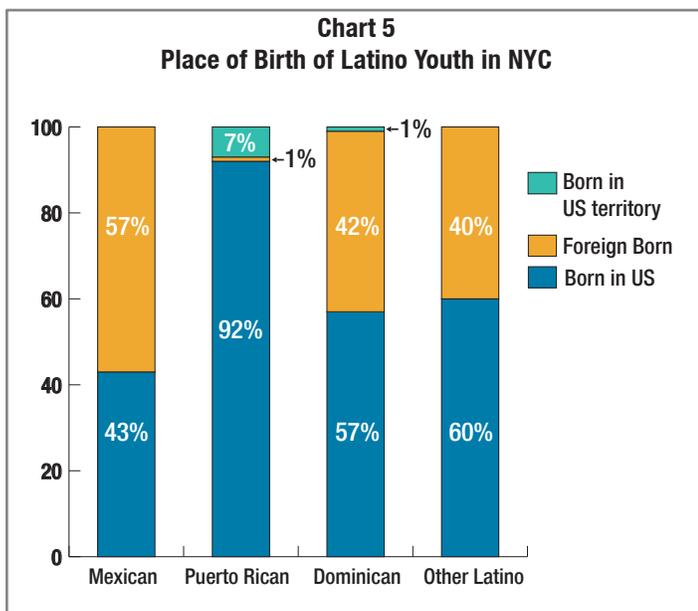
	Male	Female	Under 16 Years Old	16-24 Years Old	25+ Years Old
Jackson Heights	61%	39%	26%	18%	56%
Sunset Park	57%	43%	30%	16%	54%
Bushwick	52%	48%	32%	17%	51%
Elmhurst/Corona	58%	42%	28%	16%	56%
Mot Haven/Hunts Point	61%	39%	30%	15%	55%
NYC Total	57%	43%	30%	16%	54%

Neighborhoods with large Mexican populations have varying degrees of demographic similarity to the city’s Mexican population overall.

There are not many large demographic differences in neighborhoods with high Mexican populations. Bushwick does appear to be more of a family neighborhood, with higher percentages of females and children. Jackson Heights, on the other hand, seems to be home to more single workers, having higher rates of males (61 percent) and the lowest rates of children (26 percent).

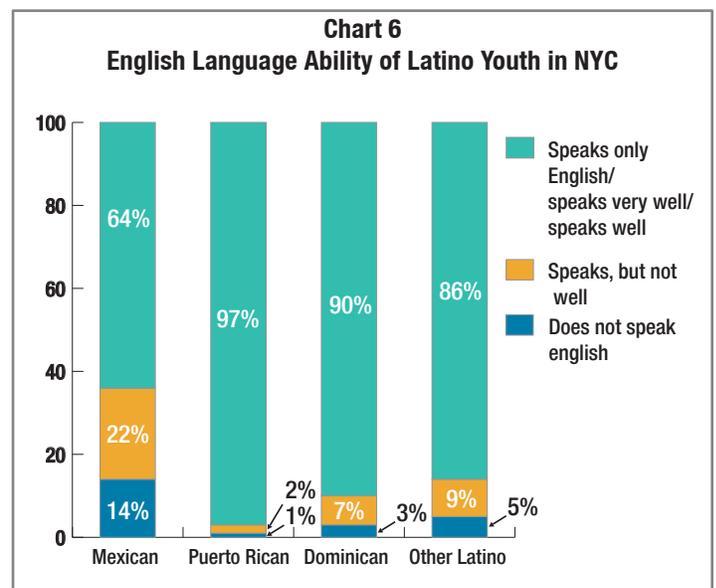
III. General Characteristics of Mexican Youth in New York City

As we have seen, Mexicans are the youngest subgroup among Latinos, who are the youngest race/ethnicity in New York City. As such, they will be a growing presence among the adult population and students in our public schools. This and the subsequent sections focus on the rapidly growing population of Mexican youth ages 16 through 24.



Unlike their Latino peers, the majority of Mexican youth were born outside of the United States. Mexicans are the only major subgroup of Latino youth who are more likely to have been born abroad.

Puerto Rican youth in New York City are overwhelmingly born in the United States, and Dominicans, who were largely an immigrant group not long ago, now have a majority of youth who are native born as well.



Although most Mexicans are still born outside the United States, a large and growing share (43 percent) are born here. And among Mexicans under age 16, this increases to 92 percent. Very few Mexicans immigrate here with children; rather, the overwhelming majority of children are born here.

Among Latino young people, language issues appear largely confined to Mexicans. Over a third (36 percent) of Mexican young people have challenges speaking English, with 14 percent not speaking English at all.

Just 3 percent of Puerto Ricans, 10 percent of Dominicans, and 14 percent of Other Latinos have limited English language abilities. This finding may have implications for

decisions about English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programming—neighborhoods with high Mexican populations are likely good candidates for these resources.

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of young Mexicans in New York is their household status. Far more than any other group, Mexican young people are neither head of their households, spouses/partners, nor dependents. Nearly half (47 percent) of Mexican young people do not fit into any of these categories.

Over a third (36 percent) of Mexican young people have challenges speaking English, with 14 percent not speaking English at all.

Most of these unaccompanied young people are either siblings, other relatives, or in housemate/roommate situations. Such households may be a feature of newer immigrant groups dominated by males who are here to work, saving money in shared households, or unable to afford other circumstances. Mexican young people live in

households that are, on average, larger than other youth, and this may be due to the greater presence of household members outside of the nuclear family. Nearly half of Mexican youth live in households with between five to seven members; for youth overall, only 28 percent live in households that size.

Mexican New Yorkers also present very unique trends in regard to the types of housing in which they live. Mexican immigrants are far less likely to own homes than other immigrants groups, and are far more likely to live in unregulated rental housing.

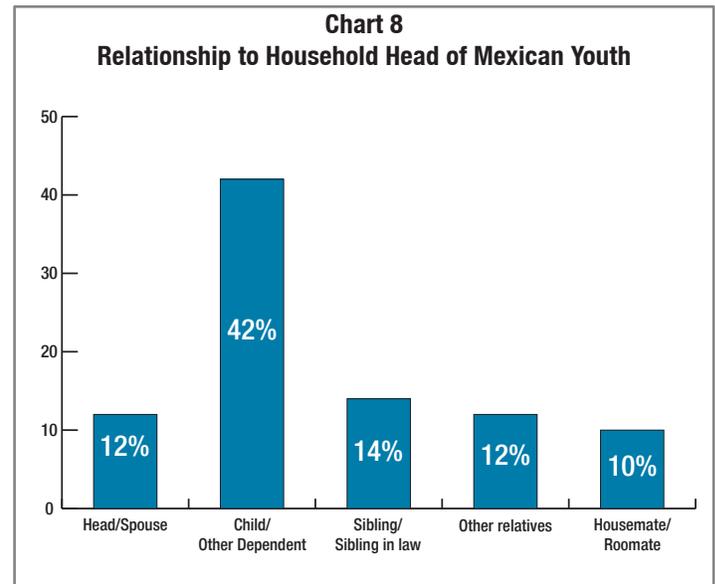
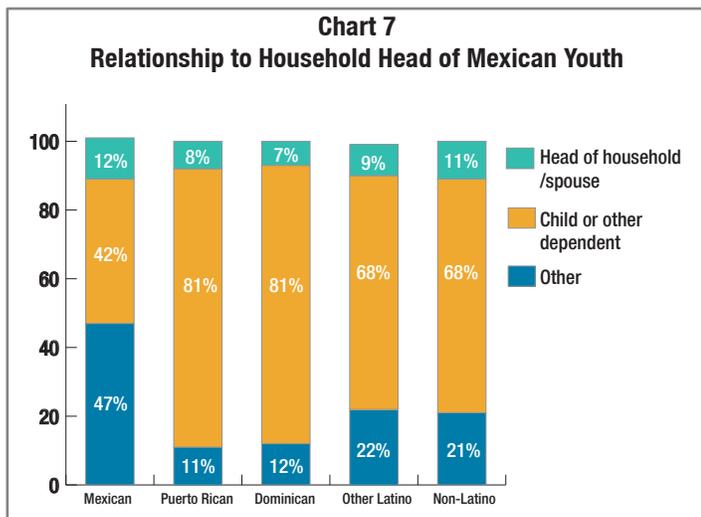


Table 2: Type of Housing for Immigrant Groups in New York City

First Generation Only	Owner	Rent-Regulated Tenant	Mitchell-Lama Tenant	HUD Tenant	Public Housing Tenant	Unregulated Tenant
Dominican Rep	9.4%	58.7%	1.0%	4.7%	12.7%	13.1%
Caribbean, not PR/DR	35.2%	31.1%	1.3%	0.6%	4.0%	27.7%
Mexico	3.7%	48.1%	0.0%	0.7%	2.0%	45.4%
Central Am/South Am	26.4%	34.4%	0.3%	1.4%	5.4%	32.0%
Europe, not FSU	44.9%	26.8%	1.0%	0.6%	1.5%	25.1%
Former Soviet Union	31.6%	45.1%	5.2%	3.3%	1.0%	13.6%
East Asia	41.1%	20.4%	2.1%	2.1%	3.7%	30.2%
South Asia	32.4%	38.4%	1.7%	0.0%	0.2%	27.3%
Other Asia	34.4%	32.6%	1.5%	0.8%	0.9%	29.8%
Africa	18.1%	48.2%	3.8%	0.9%	3.6%	25.5%

*Data for this table comes from the CSS analysis of the 2011 New York City Housing Vacancy Survey (HVS), conducted by the United States Census Bureau. We only present on first generation New Yorkers because the HVS sample is not large enough for analysis of other generations of Mexican immigrants.

IV. School Enrollment and Educational Attainment

Across racial/ethnic groups, Latino young people have the lowest rates of school enrollment. Just 54 percent of Latino youth are in school, compared to 60 percent of blacks, 64 percent of whites, and 73 percent of Asians. And whereas whites and Asians show virtually no differences in school enrollment by gender, a far greater share of Latino females attend school than males.

Much of this disparity can be explained by the differences in school enrollment between native and foreign-born young people. Native-born Latinos (61 percent) attend school at rates similar to those of blacks (60 percent), below those of whites (64 percent) and far lower than those of Asians (78 percent). But the major outlier is foreign-born Latinos, just 38 percent of whom attend school, well below immigrant blacks (58 percent), whites (64 percent), and Asians (70 percent).

Foreign-born whites and blacks do not show much difference in their school enrollment compared to their native-born peers. And while fewer foreign-born Asian young people attend school than their native-born counterparts, immigrant Asian young people are still enrolled in school at a higher rate (70 percent) than any other native- or foreign-born racial or ethnic group.

Within Latino youth, Mexicans have, by far, the lowest rates of school enrollment. Just 37 percent of Mexican young people are enrolled in school, including only 31 percent of young Mexican males. Across groups, females attend school at higher rates than males, but this difference is greatest among Mexicans and Other Latinos.

Again, much of the difference between Mexicans and other groups can be explained by immigration. Just 15 percent of young Mexicans born outside the United States attend school. (Within the 16 to 24 age category, school enrollment decreases even further after age 18, when less than one in ten Mexican immigrants are in college.) Dominican youth (51 percent) and Other Latinos (40 percent) born overseas attend at higher rates. In the case of Dominicans, this may be because they came here at an earlier age with their families and may also be related to household status. More Dominican immigrant youth are dependents and part of families.

Native-born Mexicans, however, attend school at the highest rates (67 percent) among Latino young people, much more so than Puerto Ricans (just 54 percent), and slightly higher than Dominicans (64 percent). This may represent a promising sign for this growing population.

Looking at educational attainment of young people who have already left school provides another lens with which to examine progress. Whereas high school enrollment rates can offer hope, it is most valuable for students to graduate and attain the highest level of educational certification possible. When we examine out-of-school youth, we see that nearly 60 percent of young Mexican men—and nearly half of

young Mexican women—who are out of school lack a high school diploma.

Just 37 percent of Mexican young people are enrolled in school, including only 31 percent of young Mexican males.

Across Latino youth groups, Mexicans, both men and women, have the highest rates of individuals who have not achieved a high school degree. But as shown in Table 6, much of the disparity is due to the differences between immigrants and native-born Mexicans. A considerably higher share of foreign-born Mexicans (57 percent) has less than a high school diploma compared to those born in the United States (43 percent). At some level, the low educational attainment of immigrant Mexicans may be of less concern if those individuals are still able to find work; as we will see, many are able to do so. But for them to be able to advance past the lowest paying jobs, they may need to increase their skills. The majority of Mexican young people who have come here as immigrants do not have a high

Table 3: School Enrollment of 16-24 year Olds in NYC

School Enrollment	White	Black	Asian	All Latino
Male	65%	58%	73%	48%
Female	64%	62%	74%	59%
Total	64%	60%	73%	54%
School Enrollment	White	Black	Asian	All Latino
Foreign Born	64%	58%	70%	38%
Native Born	64%	60%	78%	61%
Total	64%	60%	73%	54%

Table 4: School Enrollment of 16-24 year Old Latinos in NYC

School Enrollment	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Male	31%	51%	54%	50%
Female	45%	57%	63%	64%
Total	37%	54%	59%	57%
School Enrollment	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Foreign Born	15%	N/A	51%	40%
Native Born	67%	54%	64%	68%
Total	37%	54%	59%	57%

school degree, and may face challenges of numeracy and literacy in English and possibly Spanish. This lack of skills may not prevent them from working, but could prevent them from advancing to jobs with family sustaining wages.

Of perhaps equal or greater concern is the comparison of educational attainment across native-born Latinos. Mexicans born in the United States who are not in school also have the lowest levels of educational attainment: 43 percent have not attained a high school or equivalent diploma. This is far higher than Puerto Ricans (35 percent), Dominicans (30 percent), and Other Latino (21 percent) young people born here, and looks even worse next to white (8 percent) and Asian (19 percent) out-of-school young adults.

This is a troubling development, especially since the native-born Mexican population is growing quickly. And whereas we might attribute the low educational attainment of immigrants to their own selection—they have come here because of their low educational attainment and a lack of options in their home country—it is harder to rationalize the lack of educational success of Mexicans born here and brought through our educational system. Many immigrants come here in the hopes that their children will have greater opportunities than they did—if this is the case for Mexican immigrants, these hopes are not being realized. Heightening concerns is that this is occurring despite the fact that—as we saw earlier in Table 4—native-born Mexicans in New York City have higher rates of school enrollment than other

Table 5: Educational Attainment of Latino Youth Not Attending School in NYC

	Highest Level Attained	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Males	Less than HS	57%	38%	35%	37%
	HSD/GED only	34%	41%	39%	35%
	Some college	5%	17%	22%	21%
	BA or higher	4%	5%	5%	8%
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Females	Less than HS	47%	34%	28%	25%
	HSD/GED only	34%	36%	33%	39%
	Some college	11%	24%	25%	23%
	BA or higher	8%	7%	14%	14%
		100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6: Educational Attainment of Latino Youth Not Attending School in NYC

	Highest Level Attained	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Foreign Born	Less than HS	57%	N/A	33%	41%
	HSD/GED only	34%	N/A	37%	37%
	Some college	6%	N/A	23%	16%
	BA or higher	4%	N/A	7%	6%
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Native Born	Less than HS	43%	35%	30%	21%
	HSD/GED only	33%	39%	36%	35%
	Some college	12%	20%	24%	28%
	BA or higher	12%	6%	11%	16%
		100%	100%	100%	100%

groups. Native-born Mexicans may be more likely to attend school and seek a diploma, but they appear less likely to actually attain one.

These findings raise doubt that native-born Mexicans are more likely to pursue and succeed in education than their foreign-born peers, who are perhaps more likely to immigrate to the United States for employment opportunities.

Nearly 60 percent of young Mexican men—and nearly half of young Mexican women—who are out of school lack a high school diploma.

Increasing such doubt is recent data from a report by the New York City Independent Budget Office that shows poor outcomes for foreign-born Mexican youth who attend city public high schools. Students born in Mexico have lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates than their peers. (Unfortunately, this data is not available for youth born in the United States by nation of ancestry.)

Just 43 percent of youth born in Mexico who enroll in New York City public high schools end up graduating, far lower than the rates for foreign-born Latinos overall (56 percent), and U.S.-born Latinos (60 percent).

This statistic again raises the question of whether low school enrollment and educational outcomes for young Mexican immigrants in New York are strictly due to the fact that many have come here to work, and are not interested in school. These data might lead one to believe that Mexican young people who are interested in education have difficulty achieving success in New York City schools, and raises questions about the disparities in their outcomes and those

of other immigrant youth in our schools. It also provides a disappointing complement to data about the poor educational outcomes of native-born Mexicans.

It may be true that large numbers of Mexican immigrant youth, particularly those between the ages of 20 through 24, come to New York City to work. As such, we may be less concerned about their lack of educational attainment. But it is harder to rationalize the alarming dropout rate of foreign-born Mexicans who do enroll in New York City public schools, or the growing number of Mexican young people born and raised here who are not succeeding in our schools.

School enrollment in early education provides another lens with which to examine the trajectories of Mexican youth. Enrollment in early education programs is associated with a range of positive outcomes including higher academic achievement in the primary and secondary grades, increased college going, and higher earnings.⁴

Table 7: High School Graduation Rates for NYC Students⁵

Class of 2009	Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate
All Students	66%	21%
White	79%	8%
Black	62%	12%
Asian	80%	6%
All Latino	59%	15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Born Latino • Foreign-Born Latino • Foreign-Born Mexican 	60% 56% 43%	14% 17% 25%

Yet while five and six year-olds are overwhelmingly enrolled in kindergarten and first-grade (which is mandatory), just 33 percent of Mexican three year-olds and 73 percent of Mexican four year-olds are enrolled in school. This compares poorly to both whites (60 percent for three year-olds and 81 percent for four year-olds) and blacks (48 percent for three year-olds and 76 percent for four year-olds). The numbers for Mexicans are similar to those of Asians (32 percent for three year-olds and 71 percent for four year-olds) and improve on the numbers for Latinos overall when looking at four year-olds (33 percent for three year-olds and 66 percent of four year-olds).

Table 8: Early Education Enrollment Rates

Mexican Children School Enrollment	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old	6 years old
No, not in school	67%	27%	2%	8%
Yes, in school	33%	73%	98%	92%

Young Mexican immigrants have very high rates of employment, but at the lowest paying jobs. Young Mexicans born in the US work at rates similar to their peers.

V. Employment, Earnings, and Industries

Mexican males have low rates of school enrollment, but very high rates of employment. Less than a third (31 percent) are in school, but nearly six in ten (59 percent) are working. Young Mexican women have high rates of disconnection from school and the labor market: one in three are not working, nor attending school.⁶

The good news for Mexican males is that they have the lowest rates of disconnection – only 10 percent are not in school, nor working. Of these, only a tiny fraction of out-of-school Mexican males (3 percent) are looking for work but unable to find it.

These numbers compare very favorably to Puerto Rican males, of whom one in three (33 percent) are not working, nor in school. Twelve percent of Puerto Rican males are looking for work but unable to find it, while an additional 21 percent are not in school and not even looking for work. Among Dominican male young adults, 24 percent are not in school, nor working.

Mexican women have very high rates of disconnection (33 percent)—however, given that most Mexican females are largely not unemployed, but rather out of the labor force entirely, we might assume that these may be voluntary decisions related to family responsibilities.

As with school enrollment and educational attainment, it is important to view foreign and native-born young people separately when discussing employment. Foreign-born Mexicans have higher rates of employment, whereas native-born Mexicans are more likely to be enrolled in school.

Table 9: School Enrollment and Labor Force Participation for Latino Youth in NYC

		Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Males	Not in School, Employed	59%	17%	22%	33%
	Not in School, Unemployed	3%	12%	10%	7%
	Not in School, Not in Labor Force	7%	21%	14%	10%
	In School	31%	51%	54%	50%
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Females	Not in School, Employed	22%	17%	18%	17%
	Not in School, Unemployed	6%	8%	6%	5%
	Not in School, Not in Labor Force	27%	18%	13%	14%
	In School	45%	57%	63%	64%
		100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 10: School Enrollment and Labor Force Participation for Latino Youth in NYC

		Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Foreign Born	Not in School, Employed	64%	N/A	25%	39%
	Not in School, Unemployed	4%	N/A	9%	6%
	Not in School, Not in Labor Force	17%	N/A	15%	15%
	In School	15%	N/A	51%	40%
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Native Born	Not in School, Employed	16%	17%	17%	17%
	Not in School, Unemployed	4%	10%	7%	6%
	Not in School, Not in Labor Force	14%	19%	12%	9%
	In School	67%	54%	64%	68%
		100%	100%	100%	100%

The school/work distribution varies widely for native and foreign-born Mexican young people. Sixty-four percent of foreign-born Mexicans are working, compared to just 16 percent of native-born Mexicans (those numbers are essentially reversed looking at school enrollment). The unemployment rate for out of school, foreign-born Mexican youth in New York City is just 5.9 percent. This figure is extremely low given the low average level of education of this population. In fact, foreign-born Mexican youth, the majority of whom do not have a high school or equivalent

diploma, have a lower unemployment rate than the average adult New Yorker with a bachelor’s degree.⁷

Native-born Mexicans show school and work participation rates that are much more in line with other Latino subgroups. Interestingly, native-born Mexicans also have unemployment rates that are lower than other groups.

Not all jobs, however, are created equal. Latino young people, in general, and Mexicans, in particular, are much more likely to have jobs in the “low paying services”

Table 11: Industry of 16-24 Year-Old Workers in New York City

	White	Black	Asian	All Latino
Blue Collar	9%	10%	8%	14%
Retail Trade	17%	26%	19%	26%
High Paying Services	26%	15%	24%	15%
Ed-Health-Soc. Services	23%	26%	24%	17%
Low Paying Services	25%	22%	24%	28%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Blue Collar	19%	10%	11%	18%
Retail Trade	20%	27%	28%	27%
High Paying Services	8%	18%	14%	16%
Ed-Health-Soc. Services	8%	21%	20%	15%
Low Paying Services	46%	23%	27%	24%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

industry.⁸ When we look more deeply at the types of jobs that young people hold, we see that their low educational attainment—in combination with other factors including a lack of networks connecting them to better paying jobs, limited English proficiency, and, possibly, documentation status—leads to Mexicans being concentrated in the service jobs that do not pay high wages.

Young Latinos (28 percent), in general, tend to work in jobs in the low paying services industries, which include

fast food restaurants and housekeeping, at rates higher than whites (25 percent), blacks (22 percent), or Asians (24 percent). But this tendency is even more pronounced for young Mexicans, 46 percent of whom work in these jobs. Conversely, just 16 percent of young Mexicans work in the more lucrative areas of high paying services (8 percent) and education-health-social services (8 percent). By contrast, 39 percent of young Puerto Ricans, 34 percent of Dominicans, and 31 percent of Other Latinos work in those fields.

Table 12: Industry of 16-24 Year-Old Workers in New York City

Foreign Born	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Blue Collar	22%	N/A	11%	31%
Retail Trade	18%	N/A	29%	18%
High Paying Services	4%	N/A	13%	11%
Ed-Health-Soc. Services	3%	N/A	18%	11%
Low Paying Services	53%	N/A	30%	29%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Native Born	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Blue Collar	11%	10%	11%	9%
Retail Trade	23%	28%	28%	23%
High Paying Services	18%	18%	15%	21%
Ed-Health-Soc. Services	20%	21%	22%	24%
Low Paying Services	27%	23%	24%	23%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Whereas Puerto Ricans and Dominicans experience a rather significant drop in workers in low paying services when looking at older workers (25 years of age and older), 40 percent of older Mexicans continue to work in low paying services.

Table 13: Median Earnings

	Median Earnings for All Full-Time Year Round Workers in New York City (all ages)
All Workers	\$42,000
White	\$60,000
Black	\$38,000
Asian	\$40,000
All Latino	\$30,000
- Mexican	\$20,800
- Native Born	- \$40,000
- Foreign Born	- \$20,000
- Puerto Rican	\$39,000
- Native Born	- \$36,000
- Foreign Born	- N/A
- Dominican	\$26,000
- Native Born	- \$33,600
- Foreign Born	- \$26,200
- Other Latino	\$32,000
- Native Born	- \$39,000
- Foreign Born	- \$32,000

Again, we see that these trends in job-holding are highly related to immigrant status. Native-born Mexicans work in jobs fairly similar to those of other native-born young Latinos, with only somewhat greater concentration in low paying services. But among immigrants, Mexicans are far more likely than Dominicans or Other Latinos to work in low paying jobs, and much less likely to work in higher paying services or education-health-social services.

As a result of the types of jobs they hold, foreign-born Mexican full-time year round workers have the lowest median earnings of any group in the city; however, native-born Mexicans have comparable earnings to the city’s overall workforce.

We see that Latinos tend to have lower earnings than other racial or ethnic groups, and that Mexicans bring these earnings down the most. We also see the divergence between the earnings of Mexicans who are native and foreign born. Interestingly, native-born Mexicans (\$40,000) earn slightly more than native-born Puerto Ricans and Other Latinos (\$39,000), and considerably more than native-born Dominicans (\$33,000).

Although Mexican workers do earn more with more education, they do so at rates lower than other workers. Of seeming concern is that, on average, the attainment of a high school degree appears to bring no earnings boost to Mexican workers. Across the labor market, workers generally see an increase in median earnings of 40 percent (from \$22,000 to \$30,700). Mexicans with some college barely earn what all workers do with just a high school diploma or equivalent; this may provide an unfortunate explanation for low graduation rates among Mexican high school students. Similarly, a bachelor’s or higher brings lower earnings for Mexicans (\$53,000) than for most workers (\$64,000).

This finding stands in contrast to conclusions that Mexicans’ low earnings are only due to their relatively low levels of

educational attainment. However, it is once again important to view these findings through the lens of immigration status. For native-born Mexicans, a high school diploma does in fact raise their earnings (from \$20,000 to \$25,000), albeit by not nearly as much as for other workers. And

As a result of the types of jobs they hold, foreign-born Mexican workers have the lowest median earnings of any group in the city.

native-born Mexican workers with a bachelor’s degree are far more likely to work in the high paying services or education-health-social sciences industries, whereas a majority of foreign-born Mexican workers with a bachelor’s degree work in blue collar jobs, retail trade, or low paying services, despite their education level. Whether this is the result of issues around English language proficiency, discrimination, or documentation status could be grounds for further examination and research.

Table 14: Median Earnings by Education Level

	Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year Round Mexican Workers in New York City	Median Earnings for All Full-Time, Year Round Workers in New York City
Less than a High School Diploma	\$20,000	\$22,000
High School Diploma/ GED only	\$20,000	\$30,700
Some college	\$30,000	\$40,000
Bachelor’s or higher	\$53,000	\$64,000

VI. Household Income and Poverty Levels

Household income of young people is all too often a negative predictor of their educational attainment, employment prospects, civic participation, and other outcomes related to economic sustainability. An examination of incomes in the households in which Mexican youth live exposes some troubling trends.

Latinos have the highest rates of individuals who live in poor or near-poor households. Twenty-nine percent of Latinos in New York City live in households that have incomes below the federal poverty line, a far higher share than any other racial/ethnic group, and nearly 2.5 times the share of poor whites. Additionally, over a quarter of Latinos live in households that are “near poor,” with incomes that are under 200 percent of the federal poverty line, again higher than any other group. Well over half (54 percent) of Latinos live in households that are “low income,” either poor or near poor.

Table 15: Poverty Rates of NYC Residents

	White	Black	Asian	All Latino
Poor	12%	22%	19%	29%
Near Poor	13%	20%	23%	26%
Moderate Income	23%	30%	27%	27%
High Income	52%	28%	32%	18%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Among Latinos, Mexicans have even higher rates of living in low-income households. One in three are poor, and two-thirds of Mexicans live in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. This is despite the fact that, as we have seen, Mexicans have the highest rates of employment among Latinos.

Eight out of ten Mexicans under the age of 16 live in households below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Nearly half are poor.

Again, we see differences when we distinguish between native and foreign-born households. Foreign-born Mexicans are more likely to be near poor, likely due to their high rates of work in low paying jobs. These jobs keep them out of absolute poverty, but keep their household incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. For context, 200 percent of the federal poverty level is just \$38,180 for a family of three.

Nearly four in ten (39 percent) native-born Mexicans are poor. Native-born Mexicans are much more likely to live in poor households than not only their foreign-born counterparts from Mexico, but any other group of native

or foreign-born Latinos. Seventy percent of Mexicans born here live in households that are low-income, well above Puerto Ricans (53 percent), Dominicans (62 percent), or other Latinos (46 percent). This disparity among native-born households is a troubling trend for this growing population of native-born Mexicans.

Table 16: Poverty Rates of Latino New Yorkers

	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Poor	33%	34%	32%	20%
Near Poor	34%	21%	29%	25%
Moderate Income	23%	24%	27%	31%
High Income	10%	21%	12%	24%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 17: Poverty Rates of Latino NYC Residents by Nativity

Foreign Born	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Poor	29%	N/A	29%	19%
Near Poor	36%	N/A	30%	26%
Moderate Income	26%	N/A	29%	33%
High Income	9%	N/A	12%	23%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Native Born	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Dominican	Other Latino
Poor	39%	33%	36%	22%
Near Poor	31%	20%	26%	24%
Moderate Income	19%	25%	25%	29%
High Income	11%	22%	13%	25%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

When we look within Mexican age groups, we see, unfortunately, that younger Mexicans are the poorest. Eight out of ten Mexicans under the age of 16 live in households below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Nearly half are poor. This may be because the low wages that Mexican workers earn transition their household from near poverty to poverty once a child is born. Whereas for the population of New Yorkers 16 years of age and older overall, the poverty rate stays relatively constant between those with children and those without, for Mexicans, the presence of children increases the poverty rate from 23 percent to 34 percent.

This is a real concern as we think about child poverty, and the patterns that may be developing for Mexican immigrants who start families and have children in New York City. The earnings of immigrants may be enough for individuals to get by, but they are not sufficient to support families. The result could be a cycle of poverty that will pass down from generation to generation.

Table 18: Poverty Rates of Mexican NYC Residents by Age Group

Mexican NYC Residents	Poor	Near Poor	Moderate Income	High Income
Under 16	45%	34%	15%	5%
16-20 years old	35%	37%	22%	7%
21-24 years old	23%	38%	31%	8%
25+	27%	33%	26%	14%

How do Mexican New Yorkers compare to those in other major cities?

A broad snapshot of individuals who identify as Mexican in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago is remarkably similar across demographic characteristics, with only one major difference: Mexicans in New York are more likely to earn less and live in poverty.

	New York City	Los Angeles	Chicago
Number of Mexicans (percent of population)	311,927 (3.8%)	1,265,380 (33%)	575,404 (21%)
Age Breakdown			
Under 16	30%	30%	31%
16-24	16%	17%	16%
25+	54%	53%	53%
Educational Attainment			
Less than HSD	67%	65%	63%
HSD/GED only	18%	17%	19%
Some college	9%	14%	13%
Bachelor's or higher	6%	5%	6%
Income Level			
Poor	33%	30%	25%
Near poor	34%	33%	34%
Moderate income	23%	25%	29%
High income	10%	11%	12%
Median earnings for full-time year round workers	\$20,800	\$23,400	\$26,000

VII. Findings and Implications

Summary of Findings

Mexican New Yorkers are relatively young and the population is growing rapidly—Mexicans are among the fastest-growing subgroups in New York City, having increased nearly five times in size over the past twenty years. Mexican New Yorkers are younger than other subgroups both Latino and otherwise, and thus will become an increasing share of the adult native-born population in New York City. Nearly 3 out of 10 Mexicans in the city are under the age of 16, a far greater share than most other ethnic groups, including other Latino subgroups. In addition, immigration from Mexico to New York City remains strong.

An increasing share of New York City's Mexican population was born here—Mexican young people are more likely than their Latino peers to be born outside of the United States and have more challenges speaking English. But younger Mexicans (under age 20) are far more likely to have been born in the United States. This speaks to a general shift in the nature of the Mexican population, from one largely comprised of immigrant adults to one with a large and increasing share of young people born here. This shift will likely bring a range of changes to the nature of Mexican communities. Already, we see that specific neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of individuals of Mexican origin are becoming home to more households with families, while other communities have higher rates of unaccompanied adults from Mexico.

Educational outcomes for native and foreign-born Mexicans are very poor—Mexican young people born outside the United States have low rates of school enrollment, likely because many have come here specifically seeking work. In this sense, we might be less concerned about their low school enrollment or previous educational attainment. But immigrant Mexican youth who do enroll in New York City public schools fare much worse than other foreign-born youth, which is harder to rationalize.

Youth born here to Mexican parents attend school at higher rates than other Latino youth. Yet Mexican youth who have left school—both native and foreign born—have considerably lower levels of educational attainment than their peers, with over half lacking a high school diploma. The fact that native-born Mexican young people are less likely than other Latinos (and other racial/ethnic groups) to attain high school diplomas and enroll in college is extremely troubling. One possible predictor of these educational struggles is that children of Mexican origin in New York City are less likely than whites or blacks to participate in early education at age three.

Mexicans work at high rates but in very low-paying jobs—Mexican young people, especially males, have much higher rates of employment than other young people, Latino or otherwise. But Mexican youth are heavily concentrated in low-wage jobs, which may be related to their generally low level of educational attainment. However, their low pay does not change significantly as Mexican New Yorkers get older or gain education. In particular, Mexicans do not see a significant earnings return from the achievement of a high school degree. Additionally, the median income for all Mexican workers is much lower than for other racial/ethnic groups. This represents a significant challenge for the ability of Mexican workers to sustain families.

As Mexicans start families, they fall below the poverty line—Mexicans between the ages of 16 and 24 do not have the highest rates of poverty among Latino groups, but have the largest share that are below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, as large numbers of Mexicans work in jobs that provide very low earnings. The poverty rate for the youngest Mexicans is extremely high, with four out of ten Mexicans under the age of 16 living in poverty. Much of this appears due to the fact that many Mexican young people come here and live neither as dependents nor as head of households, a situation that may be affordable with income from low-wage jobs. But as these individuals settle here and start families, the increased size of their household pushes them below the poverty line.

Implications for Policy

The idea of Mexicans in New York City as immigrants who have come to the United States for employment opportunities is becoming an increasingly narrow way in which to view this population. The share of Mexicans who are younger and born in the United States is growing. Unfortunately, their current participation in school and work is not promising.

On the one hand, Mexican youth born here are enrolled in school at higher rates than other Latino groups, perhaps signaling a relatively high interest in educational attainment. But this interest is not currently translating into positive outcomes. The educational outcomes for Mexicans—both native and foreign born—who do enroll in New York City schools are very poor.⁹

In terms of labor force participation, Mexicans, particularly young immigrant males, work at extremely high rates. But they disproportionately hold the lowest paying jobs. The low wages they earn may be enough to support them on their own in shared households—a circumstance very common among Mexican young people—but appear to create poverty and near poverty conditions for those who start families. The consequences of low household incomes do not appear to be good for the youngest Mexicans being born here. Mexican children have the highest rates of poverty within the community of Mexicans living in New York City.

Several policies would seem to offer a strong chance of impacting opportunities for Mexican youth. They include:

- Support for children and families in Mexican communities—Mexican households with children have frighteningly high rates of poverty. Efforts should be made to target public assistance, in the form of cash assistance, food, health, and housing support to the neighborhoods in which Mexicans live. Our data raise questions about the extent to which Mexican households access the benefits that are available to them. Further work might be conducted to understand and ensure that information about how to access public benefits reaches these communities
- Targeted educational interventions in Mexican communities—Young people of Mexican origin, be they native or foreign born, are not succeeding in New York City schools. This is troubling, particularly given the fact that native-born Mexicans between the ages of 16 and 24 are more likely to be enrolled in school than any other Latino group. Their efforts are not translating into positive outcomes, and schools need to do more to ensure Mexican young people stay in school, graduate, and have the chance to enter college. Neighborhoods with high concentrations of Mexican young people also need to be supported with high quality GED and ESOL programs for those young people who have not finished high school, either here or abroad, to ensure that they eventually have opportunities to move past the lowest-paying jobs.

The recently announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, through which individuals between the ages of 16 through 30 who arrived here before age 16 are offered a pathway to work authorization and legal status, could apply for many New Yorkers of Mexican origin. For individuals to take advantage of this opportunity, they need to have been or be enrolled in education programming. But New York City's ESOL/adult education programs generally have long waiting lists and lack the capacity to add

the estimated ten thousand-plus individuals who could enroll in order to benefit from DACA. New York City should expand ESOL and adult education programs to enable the many undocumented Mexican (and other) immigrants who came here as children to step out of the shadows and become active contributors to our tax base and formal economy.

The low rates of enrollment of Mexican youth in early education and their corresponding poor outcomes when they leave the K–12 system suggest that investments in universal pre-kindergarten programs might provide strong returns.

- Increasing the minimum wage—More than perhaps any other group, Mexican young people, who are concentrated in low-wage jobs, would benefit from a higher minimum wage. As the data suggests, Mexicans who start families here quickly slip into poverty, and need more income to support children.
- Better benefits, security, and workforce development for low-wage workers—Mexican workers are often in the lowest paying jobs and service occupations which do not provide benefits such as paid sick days. When workers are forced to choose between their health and their wages, it not only causes financial and physical stress, but can often lead to job loss. The provision of paid sick days to these workers would strengthen their financial security as well as allow workers to stay at the same job for longer and possibly work their way up within a company.

Another way to support workers in the lowest-wage jobs is to provide them with opportunities to train for better jobs while they work. New York City should invest more in programs that contextualize literacy, numeracy, and ESOL within training for middle-skill jobs that pay living wages.

Our data highlight the potentially important role that

community-based organizations (CBOs) can play in providing information and services to individuals and families of Mexican origin. CBOs can serve as a resource to Mexican communities in a variety of ways, including outreach and assistance regarding public benefit eligibility; helping keep parents involved in the education of their children; ensuring that young Mexicans eligible for DACA are able to take advantage of the program; providing literacy and numeracy skills, particularly for those striving to attain a GED; and financial literacy and counseling.

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Endnotes

¹The authors collected ACS data from the IPUMS-USA database: Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.

²There is debate about the number of Mexicans living in New York City. Our analysis of the ACS finds 311,927 individuals who identify themselves as Hispanics of primarily Mexican origin using a pooled sample from 2009 through 2011. Examining just 2010, however, as in Chart 1, we find 324,349 individuals of Mexican origin. In 2009 and 2011, we find 306,403 and 305,029, respectively. For the rest of the report, we use the pooled 2009-2011 dataset to control for yearly fluctuations in the sample (such as the higher number in 2010), and to give ourselves the statistical ability to conduct queries across sub-groups of the population that would not be significant with only one or two years of respondents in our sample. The Census Bureau also publishes figures on its website through its American Fact Finder function, which finds slightly different totals than our analysis: 305,664 in 2009; 319,458 in 2010; and 320,791 in 2011. The American Fact Finder does not publish its methodology, and it is unclear why the two analyses mirror each other in 2009 and 2010, but are so different in 2011. Separately, some individuals believe that there are even high numbers of New Yorkers of Mexican origin who are not captured by Census data.

³Thomas Waters and Victor Bach, “Housing the City of Immigrants,” Community Service Society of New York, March 2011.

⁴Frances A. Campbell, Craig T. Ramney, “Preventive education for high-risk children: Cognitive consequences of the Carolina Abecedarian Project.” *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, Vol 88(5), Mar 1984, 515-523.

⁵Graduates, Dropouts, Discharges: Tracking Four-Year Outcomes For the Class of 2009,” NYC Independent Budget Office, September 2012.

⁶Disconnection rates combine the percentage of those who are not in school and unemployed and the percentage of those who are not in school and not in the labor force. The difference between these two groups is that those who are unemployed are actively looking for work, but unable to find it, whereas those who are not in the labor force are not looking for work. Definitions of disconnection vary along these lines, but for the purposes of this report, we include both groups as being disconnected.

⁷Education Calculator, New York State Department of Labor. <http://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/cen/calc1.asp>

⁸Jobs in “low paying services” include those in accommodations, food services, and other personal services. Conversely, jobs in “high paying services” include those in finance, real estate, management, and other professional services.

⁹For immigrants, we know this directly from NYCDOE data presented in Table 7. For native born, we see this in the levels of educational attainment among native-born Mexicans presented in Table 6.

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