LEARNING A NEW LAND

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Carola Suárez-Orozco
Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco
Irina Todorova

The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 2008

CHAPTER 3

Less-Than-Optimal Schools

AMERICAN EDUCATION matters more than ever before. While a hundred years ago immigrant youth could (and routinely did) drop out of school without hampering their futures, today the costs of so doing are substantial.[1] The stakes are high because the global workplace requires much more than the simple, rote memorization idealized in twentieth-century education. Instead, it demands the capacity to think analytically and creatively both within a single discipline as well as in an interdisciplinary manner, the ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds, and an understanding of both historical and global perspectives.[2]

We all want our children to attend schools that are rigorous and engaging, as well as safe and welcoming. We wish for schools that maintain high standards and expectations for all students. We want our children to learn how to learn so they may become lifelong learners, as they need to be in order to succeed in our new economy. Ample research demonstrates that effective schools have strong leadership and high staff morale; high academic expectations for all students regardless of their backgrounds; respect for students' heritage cultures and languages; and a safe, orderly school climate.[3]

In recent years, the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation has been calling for a reappraisal of the oft-referred-to "three Rs" of education. Until the waning years of the last century, students needed to be grounded in readin', 'ritin, and 'rithmetic. The Gates Foundation argues that in order to engage learners and prepare them for the new economy, schools must provide a new group of characteristics: *rigor* in challenging classes, *relevance* to

engaging topics that "relate clearly to their lives in today's rapidly changing world," and *relationships* with adults "who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve."[4]

Principals play a critical role. A charismatic leader articulates a vision of the school's mission and projects a collective sense of purpose to the entire school community—teachers, students, and parents. An effective instructional leader maintains high expectations (and makes it clear that teachers are expected to do the same) for all the students in the school, making sure that the students are provided with rich, engaging, and relevant curricula. A successful principal reaches out to parents and makes links with community organizations, creating strategic alliances with local businesses to invest needed resources in their schools. A strong principal fosters a warm, safe, and inclusive school climate where students can focus on learning. In short, principals who are able to provide this kind of transformational leadership can substantially improve school performance.[5]

But such principals are as few and far between as are exemplary schools. Our data demonstrate that most of the newcomer immigrant students in our sample attended schools that fell far short of these ideals. In fact, most of the children in this study attended schools that not only obstructed learning and engagement but also were, in many ways, toxic to healthy learning and development. Rather than providing "fields of opportunity," all too many were "fields of endangerment."[6]

Fields of Endangerment

Most of the students in our study attended highly segregated schools where more than three-quarters of their peers were of color and many were from poor families. In recent years, despite legislation passed in the 1960s designed to reduce segregation, our schools have become increasingly resegregated. This new pattern of segregation tends to be not just about color but also about poverty and linguistic isolation—so-called triple segregation.[7] This development is of deep concern because these types of segregation have proven to be inexorably linked to negative educational outcomes—including climates of low expectations and academic performance, reduced school resources, lower achievement, greater school violence, and higher drop-out rates. As a recent report from Harvard University's Civil Rights Project establishes: "The strong relationship between

poverty, race and educational achievement and graduation rates shows that, but for a few exceptional cases under extraordinary circumstances, schools that are separate are still unquestionably unequal."[8]

Poor children clearly face particular challenges. Although some immigrant youth come from privileged backgrounds, large numbers of immigrant youth today, especially those who come from Latin America and the Caribbean, face challenges associated with poverty. Immigrant children are more than four times as likely as native-born children to live in crowded housing conditions and three times as likely to be uninsured.[9] Children raised in circumstances of poverty are more vulnerable to an array of psychological distresses that impair educational outcomes, including difficulties concentrating and sleeping, anxiety, and depression.[10] Poverty has long been recognized as a particularly significant risk factor for educational access. It limits opportunities and frequently coexists with a variety of other factors that augment risks—such as violent neighborhoods saturated with gang activity and drug trade, as well as schools that are segregated, overcrowded, and understaffed.[11]

In such settings, students' opportunities are hemmed in on all sides. Resources are scarce and the buildings are thus often run down, with peeling paint and litter all about. Classrooms are typically overcrowded and the curriculum is outdated and irrelevant. Classroom routines can be mind-numbingly unengaging—often consisting of below-grade-level worksheets or outdated videos. In many classrooms we studied, "non-teaching" or "teaching to the talented tenth" was prevalent. Instruction is often tracked, especially for English-language learners who are put into dumbed-down classes in which they fall further and further behind their English-speaking peers. Few students go on to four-year colleges, so college counseling is only minimally available. In such settings, teachers tend to be inexperienced, teaching outside their content area, or uncredentialed. Morale is low and turnover of teachers and principals is high.

The climate in these schools challenges even the most dedicated and focused students. Such settings promote neither learning nor a sense of safety.[12] A recent report noted: "If an adult had to work in an environment where disrespect, bad language, fighting, and drug and alcohol abuse are practiced by a relative few, but tolerated or winked at by the management, it might be considered a 'hostile workplace.'"[13] Yet this is precisely the environment that many immigrant students and students of color encounter at school.

Parents often voiced concerns about the violence they perceived at their children's schools. The mother of Rolando, a fifteen-year-old Central American boy, remarked: "The role of the school is to educate the students the best that they can so that they can have a better future. But unfortunately, there are many terrible things going on in schools, many delinquent students killing others. It is very sad because the students feel unsafe." Students often told us how their peers contribute to unsafe school and community environments. As sixteen-year-old Graciela from Central America remarked: "Sometimes there are fights in school. This causes problems for me because I think about these fights instead of my work." Fourteen-year-old Jean from Haiti likewise said: "I don't like it when kids are bad at school—like to the teachers, when kids don't listen and try to beat up the teachers."

Such contexts undermine students' capacity to concentrate, their sense of security, and their ability to experience trusting relationships in school, as well as their ability to learn. When we asked students to tell us about their perceptions of school problems and violence, an alarming number of them spoke of crime, violence, feeling unsafe, gang activity, weapons, drug dealing, and racial conflicts.[14] As we saw in Chapter 1, student perceptions of school violence were highly related to their academic engagement. Students who attended schools where they perceived such problems were more likely to disengage—"low achiever" and "precipitous decliner" students reported the most school violence and problems. We also found a strong correlation between students' perceptions of school problems and a variety of "objective" indicators of school performance available through school districts' public access websites.[15]

Statistics for Schools in the Study

School districts make public information available about a variety of indicators of school quality, including percentages of students attending the school who are poor (assessed by whether they are eligible for free or reduced lunch); segregation rate (the racial and ethnic composition of the school); percentages of inexperienced teachers (or out-of-subject certifica-

tion rate); greater than average school size; drop-out rate; daily attendance rate; whether suspension rates and expulsion rates are higher than average; percentage of students performing below proficiency on the state-administered English language arts (ELA) or math standardized tests; and a significant achievement gap on the standardized exam between one or more ethnic groups that attend the school.[16] Each of these characteristics has been linked to lower student performance.[17]

What kinds of schools were the participants in our study attending? By the last year of the study, 74 percent were attending high school, with 96 percent of our students attending public noncharter schools. Though there is a growing body of evidence that students learn better in small schools of five hundred or fewer students, only 12 percent attended such schools. The majority of our participants (65 percent) attended large schools with more than a thousand students, and 22 percent attended a school with between five hundred and a thousand students.[18]

Most of our students' schools were also highly racially and economically segregated. Eighty-six percent attended schools in which more than half of students were of color, and 54.2 percent attended schools where more than 90 percent of students were minority students. Nearly 60 percent attended schools where at least half of students were classified as low income.

There were significant differences in segregation patterns by country of origin. Dominicans were most likely to attend low-income schools, followed by Mexicans. Fewer than half of the Chinese students in our sample attended schools where most of the students were of color, whereas nearly all of the other immigrant students attended schools of this kind. The Latino students in our sample—Dominicans, Central Americans, and Mexicans—were much more likely than either Haitians or Chinese students to attend "intensely" segregated schools where more than 90 percent of the students were of color (Table 3.1).[19]

Not surprisingly, different academic performance trajectories, as defined in Chapter 1, were linked with different levels of segregation. "Low achievers" and "precipitous decliners" attended the poorest and most racially segregated schools. "High achievers" were least likely to attend low-income and racially segregated schools; even so, a sizeable proportion did so (Table 3.2).

Most of our students, then, were attending schools that provided a "separate and not equal" educational environment.[20] Eighty-nine percent of

Table 3.1 Percent of students in segregated schools, by country of origin

Country of origin	*N*	Segregation by income[a]	Racial segregation[b]	"Intense" racial segregation[c]
China	68	43.1	47.2	27.8
Dominican Republic	47	98.3	100.0	83.1
Central America	51	42.1	98.2	61.4
Haiti	54	44.0	98.0	30.0
Mexico	62	69.6	95.7	68.6
Total	309	59.2	86	54.2

Note: For all categories of segregation, $p < .001$.
a. Fifty percent or more of the students are from low-income families.
b. Fifty to 100 percent of the students are from racial minorities.
c. Ninety to 100 percent of the students are from racial minorities.

Table 3.2 Percent of students in segregated schools, by academic trajectory

Academic trajectory	*N*	Segregation by income[a]	Racial segregation[b]	"Intense" racial segregation[c]
Slow decliners	70	58.6	88.6	42.9
Precipitous decliners	79	65.8	96.2	63.3
Low achievers	41	68.3	97.6	75.6
Improvers	30	60.0	83.3	56.7
High achievers	63	47.6	58.7	38.1
Total	283	59.2	86.0	54.2

Note: For income segregation, p is statistically insignificant. For both types of racial segregation, $p < .001$.
a. Fifty percent or more of the students are from low-income families.
b. Fifty to 100 percent of the students are from racial minorities.
c. Ninety to 100 percent of the students are from racial minorities.

our sample attended schools with a significant achievement gap between white students and minority students on standardized performance tests.[21] Predictably, many of these schools had higher than average dropout and suspension rates.[22] Their teacher-student ratio was also higher than the state average and they had a lower-than-average rate of teachers who were accredited and teaching in their specialized subject areas.[23]

How did the schools our students attended compare to other schools in the Boston and San Francisco metropolitan areas, where we drew our sample? In order to contextualize our school data, we compared the school statistics for the schools our participants were attending to those of all the

Table 3.3 Aggregated district contextual data

Characteristic	San Francisco area[a]				Boston area[b]			
	Our sample		Metro area		Our sample		Metro area	
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
School statistics								
Percentage of school population that is low income	49.9	(23.7)	57.8	(9.0)	49.1	(23.5)	51.8	(23.3)
	85.8	(17.4)	88.0	(5.2)	73.9	(25.1)	67.7	(26.1)
Percentage of minority students								
Percentage of school population that is Limited English Proficient or English Learners	36.1	(16.5)	30.2	(3.9)	17.3	(13.9)	18.3	(8.5)
	20.2 to 1	(2.3)	18.3 to 1	(1.0)	16.0 to 1	(4.4)	13.1 to 1	(2.3)[c]
Student/teacher ratio	95.3	(4.7)	94.4	(.2)	90.2	(5.3)	93.4	(1.1)
School avg. daily attendance rate (in percent)	24.1	(22.7)	15.3	(18.8)	16.0	(9.8)	11.9	(3.2)
Suspension rate (in percent)								
Percentage of school population at proficiency or above on state English language arts exam	15.4	(13.8)	29.1	(9.4)	36.5	(26.7)	43.1	(15.7)

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all district data are taken from the 2002–2003 school year due to availability of complete public data.
a. School districts include Oakland Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, and West Contra Costa School District.
b. School districts include Boston Public Schools, Cambridge Public Schools, Lawrence Public Schools, and Quincy Public Schools.
c. 2003–2004 district data.

public schools in the same districts. Thus we compared the schools our Mexican and Central American participants were attending to those in the same San Francisco metropolitan area districts, and the schools our Chinese, Dominican, and Haitian students were attending to the public schools in the same Boston metropolitan districts (Table 3.3).[24]

Several facts stand out in these comparisons. First, our sample students attended schools that, according to the criteria we used, were similar to other public schools in the same districts. There was only a small percentage difference for poverty and diversity (with a bit more of a gap in Boston), and our participants tended to attend schools with somewhat higher teacher/student ratios and suspension rates. The greatest difference between our participants' schools and schools in the general area was on the rate of passage of the high-stakes English-language test. Strikingly, too, the schools in the Boston area fared better on all the school statistics than did schools in the San Francisco area districts. (The Mexican and Central American participants, then, were attending schools that presented the least optimal learning environments to their students.)

As might be expected, the indicators of school quality were consistent with poor performance on the standardized testing indicators. Fewer than one-third of all the students in these schools, as reported by the districts and the states, reached proficiency level or higher on the states' English language arts exam. Students in our study from different countries of origin attended schools that had different exam results. While Chinese students attended schools where 59 percent of the schools' students performed at the proficient or above level on the state English language arts standardized exam, only 37 percent of Haitians, 20 percent of Dominicans and Central Americans, and 16 percent of Mexicans did so. Not surprisingly, using our trajectories of performance as a lens, we found that a higher percentage of high achievers attended schools where more students pass the exam (47 percent), whereas low achievers and precipitous decliners attended schools where only a small percentage of their students passed these tests (21 and 25 percent, respectively).

We found a highly significant relationship between schools that were both poor and racially segregated, and our participants' grades during the last year of the study.[25] There was an even stronger relationship between those schools and students' Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement scores.[26] Students who attended these kinds of schools received lower

grades and did less well on the achievement test we administered. The inescapable reality is that schools matter for the performance of their students. Many newcomer immigrants enter poor and segregated schools, and are consequently at a significant disadvantage as they strive to adapt to a new culture, learn a new language, master the necessary skills to pass high-stakes tests, accrue graduation credits, get into college, and attain the skills needed to compete in workplaces shaped by the new global economy.

School Ethnographies

Quantitative data from the school district provide an index of the discrepancies between schools, but offer little insight into the day-to-day realities of school life for immigrant children. To more fully understand their everyday experiences, we spent long hours in our participants' schools, and here we present ethnographies from four of them—two middle schools and two high schools. We picked these particular sites after our first year in the field, once we understood the range of schools our students attended. Each of these four schools had fifteen or more of our participants in attendance at some point in the study. We selected two "less than optimal schools" and two "better than average" schools, in order to capture the range of experiences that our participant students were encountering in their schools.

Quentin Middle School

Quentin Middle School is in northern California.[27] The city of "Quentin" lies between two sites of natural beauty—a spectacular bay to the west and rolling hills to the east. Incorporated in 1905, Quentin's economy boomed through the first half of the last century and reached its zenith during the 1940s and 1950s. During World War II, Quentin served as a major shipbuilding center, but today most of its industries stand idle. The one exception is in the hill area to the north, where a large, active oil refinery is a source of ambivalence for the community. While the refinery provides many jobs, it spews toxins into the air; occasional explosions leave an oily stench.

Accompanying the downturn in employment, this city of now just over 100,000 experienced a marked rise in drug- and gang-related violence during the 1980s. By the early 1990s, it had a homicide rate of seven times the national average, with more than sixty homicides during 1998, the year our study began. That year, the police department responded to 911 emergency calls every seven minutes. On average, calls reporting "shots fired" came in seven times a day, for a total of 2,640 such calls during the year. Despite increased police patrols, even today this city is one of America's fifteen most dangerous.[28]

Driving along Main Avenue, a dilapidated stretch of road leading to the school, we pass commercial establishments in various states of decay: a liquor store here, a used-car lot there, a gas station beyond. The businesses that are open seem neglected. Many storefronts are empty or abandoned, with broken windows, peeling paint, and garbage strewn about. Flamboyant graffiti covers entire buildings, proclaiming the presence of local gangs: the Black Crips and Bloods, the Mara Salvatruchas (a brutal and widespread Salvadorian gang), and various Norteño and Sureño Mexican gangs. There are few homes along Main Avenue. The streets are deserted, save for isolated groups of men. The feeling of decay and disrepair is inescapable.

The remaining businesses cater to the area's diverse ethnic groups. African American women frequent the nail salons and the hairstylists who specialize in hair extensions and braiding. Mexicans run restaurants and grocery stores with Spanish names—Carneceria (meat market), Frutas y Legumbres (fresh produce), Jugos y Licuados (juices and smoothies). There are Thai and Vietnamese stores and restaurants, too. These are locally owned businesses, and many of the proprietors are parents of children enrolled at Quentin Middle and other neighborhood schools. Right by the school are liquor stores, bars, and adult-video stores. Even some establishments that do not identify themselves as "adult-oriented" have pornographic material on display. We often spotted Quentin Middle students entranced by the adult videos playing on the store monitors.

At Quentin Middle School, more than three-quarters of the students are either Latino or African American: specifically, 45 percent are Latino, 31 percent are African American, 15 percent are Asian, 7 percent are white, 1.5 percent are Filipino, 0.3 percent are Pacific Islander, and 0.2 percent are Native American. Mexicans make up by far the largest immigrant group in the school: nearly 90 percent of all immigrant students there are Mexican. The remaining immigrants came from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and

Central and South America. The school is deeply segregated by language (Spanish and English) and by race and ethnicity (African Americans and Latinos). Eighty percent of the students are designated as low income. Only 7 percent of the students who took the state high-stakes English language arts exam scored at or above the minimum state standard.

On our first visit, Quentin Middle School looks uninviting; impersonal, dreary, austere. The school covers a full city block. The schoolyard fence encloses five basketball courts and a grassy area of equal size. The main two-story building houses classrooms, offices, library, and a large cafeteria. Its walls are painted industrial gray and green, but they are covered with large blue and black graffiti letters. At the front door, an ominous sign greets visitors: "The site is equipped with metal detectors."

The dim, monochromatic classrooms along the long hallways, with their metal doors, are distinguishable only by their room numbers. The ethos here is decidedly institutional: correctional rather than educational, it strikes us. Scrawled on some doors are the sorts of graffiti usually reserved for bathroom stalls. The bathrooms themselves are filthy, dark, and trash-strewn. The mirrors are cracked, the soap dispensers contain no soap, there is no toilet paper, and the toilets are often backed up. The fetid smell is overpowering. Graffiti covers the walls: "Paola is a slut," "She does blow jobs," and, perhaps, an answer from Paola: "*Hijas de puta* [sons of a whore]. Tell it to my face." Outside the bathrooms, the drinking fountains—two on each side of the hall—are clogged with gum and debris. The school library on the first floor is closed more days than not because the librarian comes in only twice a week. It has just seven shelves of books.

During our time at Quentin Middle School, the administrative personnel changed. The vice-principal, Oscar Rangel, was appointed principal in 1998. Apparently, Rangel experienced adjustment problems during his transition from vice-principal to principal. Many teachers told us they were disappointed by his promotion, and they displayed little confidence in his ability. While he was always positive toward and accommodating of our research project, he often seemed remote, removed from the life of his school.

After his promotion to principal, we rarely saw Rangel in the halls, in the cafeteria, or in front of the school at the beginning or end of the day. He was almost always secluded in his office behind mounds of paper. It was the new vice-principal, Tamika Washington, a no-nonsense woman with a

severe demeanor, who became the most visible administrator. She often monitored the halls, harshly directing students back to their classrooms. Some Mexican students confided that they felt Washington did not like Mexicans and played favorites with the African American students because "they are from the same race."

As the school bell sounds, chaos explodes. Students rush from their classrooms, swarming through the halls and the schoolyard. Most of the students run, there is a lot of pushing and horseplay, and the noise is deafening. Other students—mostly boys—strut languidly, as if to broadcast a challenge: "Just try to make us get to class on time."

One day during our second year at Quentin, as we walked with two immigrant youngsters on their way to the cafeteria, we came upon a group of five African American students running and pushing each other against the hallway walls. The Mexican immigrant students tensed—one told us that this same group of students had recently shoved her against the wall, almost breaking her wrist. The nearby guards were involved in a private conversation with each other and did nothing.

Inside the cafeteria, we cannot find a single racially mixed group. The segregation here is absolute: Asians sit with Asians, blacks with blacks, Latinos with Latinos, whites with whites. The seating arrangement is a near-perfect reflection of the school's social organization. In our two years at the school, we seldom saw students from different ethnic groups working together on projects. When groups come together, it is usually to fight.

IMMIGRANT CLASSROOMS

Immigrant Spanish-speaking children who are limited in English proficiency often take all their classes together. Typically, they take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for reading and language arts and bilingual classes in math, science, and social studies. Some children may take higher levels of ESL classes. While most of the teachers in this program are identified as bilingual in Spanish and English, after the implementation of Proposition 227—which banned bilingual education in California—the teachers have been directed by the administration to use Spanish for clarification only, not as a language of instruction.

In many of these classrooms, we found a culture of "goofing off." In Mrs. Fidel's ESL I class, for example, horseplay made up much of the classroom interactions. During our observations in three ESL classes, we saw only a

quarter of the students, or fewer, working on task. The rest talked, rested, napped, or fooled around. Girls gossiped. Boys traded comic books or put together picture albums of their favorite soccer stars; others overturned trash cans onto one another's heads or challenged and even fought with boys seated nearby. Joking and physical activity were the currency that earned capital—laughter and approval—for the disruptive boys. Asked about his frequent goofing off, José, a Mexican eleven-year-old, told us: "I try to pay attention, but if the teacher starts talking in English, I kind of get lost, and the next thing I know I am thinking of something else or doing something that is not part of the class. Then I am lost and want to have fun."

The large concentration of Mexican-origin students created a special dynamic, and Mexican culture dominated the ethos of the school. ESL teachers consistently drew from Mexican culture and not from the cultural backgrounds of students of other nationalities, including Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Peruvian, and Vietnamese. One morning in late October, Graciela Fidel passed out copies of skeleton puppets *(calaveras)* by José Posada, a twentieth-century Mexican artist who drew skeletons as political statements about the inequities of the Mexican social system. When we mentioned to her how many students decided to decorate their puppets with the colors of the Mexican flag, she replied, "Oh, yes. Students like to do things with Mexican themes, even the non-Mexicans." For example, Julio, a boy from Peru, decorated his skeleton with a Mexican flag motif. Mrs. Fidel commented: "There is a lot of pressure to be 'Mexican' in this school. He has no identity as Peruvian, but as Mexican he could be recognized."

Such immersion in Mexican culture was common. Mexican Spanish was the most common language spoken. Students' clothing, binders, and book covers sported Mexican soccer-team colors or Mexican flags. Girls exchanged pictures of Mexican soap-opera stars and talked about the previous night's episodes of the shows. Quotes from TV shows on Spanish channels such as Univision became the punchline of classroom jokes. For example, a popular comedy called "Ay Maria, que punteria" (Hey Maria, you hit the nail on the head) depicts the life of an indigenous woman from rural Mexico who moves to Mexico City. In the newcomers class were several girls named Maria. Often, when the teacher called on a girl named Maria, the boys yelled, "Ay Maria, que punteria." Other Mexican items exchanged included chili-flavored candy, teen magazines from Mexico, and clips from the sports section of Mexican newspapers. Some of these items were available in the nearby Mexican markets, but students or their family members also brought them directly from Mexico.

The enormous social distance between the immigrant children in this school and white middle-class American youth was dramatic and pervasive. From the point of view of the Mexican children in this school, white American middle-class youth might as well have been in Oslo, Paris, or some other distant city, rather than just on the other side of the freeway. Here, where Mexican culture reigned supreme, supporting newcomer Mexican students became a sign of solidarity and membership and a source of empowerment in student rivalries. Most Mexican newcomers made friends immediately, an acceptance based more on regional and national origin than on language. For example, a Mexican girl and a Salvadorian girl started school on the same day. The teacher asked them to introduce themselves to the class. The Mexican girl got a cheer from the crowd when she said she was from Guadalajara, Mexico. Nobody said anything when the Salvadorian girl introduced herself as being from San Vicente, El Salvador. This reaction was typical whenever new children came into a classroom. During recess, the Mexican newcomer was already talking with a group of five Mexican girls while the Salvadorian girl sat alone on a bench.

Yet over the years we discerned tensions among the Mexican students. Newcomer youth, whom the teachers generally viewed as more studious and obedient, were mercilessly teased by their peers. Sometimes these students were called "putos," "maricas," and "jotos" (disparaging names for homosexuals) by more acculturated peers. During a visit to one ESL classroom, we overheard three Mexican boys who were sitting in the back calling another boy "puto" while he sat quietly doing his work. One of the three explained: "The thing is that he is a coward. He doesn't like to fight." Another said: "He doesn't even seem Mexican. He's giving us a bad name."

Newcomer Mexican immigrants had their own grievances about their more acculturated Mexican-American peers. Laura, a twelve-year old new immigrant from Michoacán, explained her dislike of Mexican-American girls: "Chicanas are stuck-up. I don't like them because they feel they are from here and not Mexicans, even if they are as dark as we are. They speak

Spanish, but they pretend they speak only English and they don't talk to you if you are Mexican."

LEARNING FEAR

"Slaying fugitive arrested," read a headline in the local paper. The article reported that a murder suspect had broken into the school while classes were in session and had been chased by the police inside the campus for almost two hours before he surrendered. This episode shook up everyone at the school. A teacher, Janice Smith, told us: "The police were here chasing a black man who came in the school. We didn't realize what was going on. When my fifth period was in session, I heard a lot of noise in the hall. I asked a student to go outside to see what was going on. When he opened the door, I heard somebody yelling, 'Get the hell back in the classroom and lock the door.' The boy came back and said that there was a police officer pointing at a black guy with a huge gun, maybe a rifle. Truly, it was the worst day of my life." Armida, a twelve-year-old Mexican girl in Smith's class, recalled the day's events with the same fear: "That man came into the school. It was so ugly. The teacher got so scared. She sent a boy to take a look and the boy said that the police officer was outside with a huge gun. We were all afraid."

Newly arrived immigrant students at Quentin learned to manage fear by staying in groups and by avoiding certain spaces known to be especially dangerous: the stairs, the bathrooms, and the natural creek in the schoolyard. "The Creek" was officially off-limits to students, but they congregated there anyway, engaging in behavior that was harder to get away with in the school buildings: fighting, smoking, drinking, heavy petting, and using drugs. Never once did we see a school guard near the creek. Alicia, a twelve-year-old Mexican girl, warned us, "Don't go to the creek; the *cholas* go there to smoke pot or to be with their dates. I am better off if I don't go over there." *Cholos* and *cholas*, as gang-affiliated youth are called, are said to dominate the creek, the site of ritualized interethnic fighting described in greater detail later in this chapter. In the fall of our second year at Quentin Middle School, three African American male students allegedly raped a twelve-year-old African American girl at the creek. Two of the attackers were rumored to be Quentin Middle School students, while the third suspect was said to attend a nearby high school.

Two months later, another tragedy struck when an African American student was killed in a motorcycle accident. The student was riding with his father, who was drunk. They were traveling at high speed in a slow lane and crashed into the freeway wall. The student was killed upon impact. His father, who survived the crash but sustained many injuries, was charged with involuntary manslaughter in his son's death. The dead boy's friends covered the walls of the school with banners that bore his picture, signatures, and heart-wrenching messages from schoolmates.

Then there was the school's violent tradition of "Rice and Beans," a recurring, ritualized form of fighting between Asians ("Rice") and Mexicans ("Beans"). During recess on a winter day just before Christmas break, an episode of "Rice and Beans" broke out by the creek. Some Asian students we met at the counselor's office told us that an Asian boy had beaten up the boyfriend of a Mexican girl, which had led a group of Mexican girls to attack the Asian boy. In retaliation, Asian boys had attacked a group of Mexican boys and girls.

After lunch, the principal made an announcement over the public address system: "From now on, any students involved in 'Rice and Beans' or 'Beans and Rice,' whatever you call it, will be receiving a five-day suspension. Again, no more 'Rice and Beans' will be tolerated on campus. Students involved will receive a five-day suspension."

One ESL teacher was furious that the principal had actually used the term "Rice and Beans" to refer to the fight, fuming that doing so legitimized negative stereotypes. That day, we learned that some thirty students, both boys and girls, had been involved in this latest episode of ethnic fighting, that there had been some injuries, and that all those involved had been suspended. Some students glorified these ritualistic fights, telling and retelling their "war" stories with exaggerated relish.

On another racial front, social barriers between black and Mexican children fostered suspicion, fear, and stereotypes. Many of the newcomer students found their African American peers intimidating; they reported regular bouts of bullying in the cafeteria, in the bathrooms, and when changing classes. José said, "I don't feel so good in school because most children in this school are black and some are fighters. When you are eating lunch, they go by you and take your stuff away from you. Black children attack everybody—the Chinese, the Arabs, and the Mexicans."

In both informal conversations and structured interviews, newly arrived immigrant students shared their fears. Safety came up spontaneously

much more often than learning. In one conversation, Regina, Alicia, Pablo, and Oscar, all newly arrived twelve- and thirteen-year-old immigrants from Mexico, said they felt threatened by fights, by people offering them drugs, or by sexual advances.

Regina: "There are a lot of drug users here and *chola* people. The *cholos* are the gang members who kill people."
Pablo: "The worst place is the bathroom. In the boys' bathroom, when you get in, it smells like cigarettes. The other day it smelled like marijuana. Somebody offered me some. I was afraid and ran out."
Alicia: "I knew this *chola* girl who went to The Creek during P.E. with a boy and she let him touch her private parts."
Oscar: "The stairs are very dangerous. You can get beat up there any time."

Many Mexican immigrant children said their parents had come to view the school as a "bad place" where children were at risk of getting pregnant or becoming drug users and gang members.

Regina: "My mom told me that when I finish this grade, she is going to send me to Mexico. She does not want me to go to the high school here because in the high school all children became bad. The girls get pregnant."
Alicia: "My parents are afraid that I might become a rebel, a *chola,* or a drug addict."
Regina: "My parents are afraid that in this school I might become a gang member."
Oscar: "My parents are afraid that I might smoke marijuana."
Pablo: "My mom told me that if I hang out with *cholos* in school, she's going to call the police."

During our two years at Quentin Middle School, we saw no sign of clear procedures for dealing with the oppressive air of fear and discontent. Following highly public incidents that traumatized the entire school population, administrators, faculty, and staff addressed problems only superficially. A culture of silence engulfed the school after each trauma. There was little follow-up after the rape of the girl by the creek or the boy's death on his father's motorcycle. A few posters went up announcing that counseling was available for students, but when we tried to speak with the school leadership about the fear, violence, and grief we saw the students struggling with, teachers and staff alike avoided such discussions. When we told Mrs. Fidel that her students seemed troubled by the rape and the death, she rationalized: "I don't know much about it. About the rape, I heard it was not a Latina girl, but African Americans were involved. About the kid who got killed, I don't know him. Actually, I really don't know these [non-Latino] students. I never see them, and I don't interact with them. To me, QMS students are the Latino students."

Mrs. Fidel's comment reflected what we had come to understand about Quentin Middle School: there was a pervasive culture of segregation and little sense of community. Fear, anomie, separation, and disengagement were rampant.

Putnam Middle School

Putnam Middle School is in "Putnam," a small city in Massachusetts. To its south lie a series of well-to-do residential towns; the eastern edge of the city borders the Atlantic Ocean. Putnam occupies fewer than twenty-seven square miles and is less densely settled than its neighbor (a population density of 5,062 per square mile versus the big city's population density of 11,860 per square mile).

Putnam is a historic town, home to signers of the Declaration of Independence and early American presidents. It was first settled by immigrant traders in 1625, established as a town in 1792, and incorporated as a city in 1888. Beyond trade, Putnam was an agricultural city that added fishing, shipbuilding, and granite quarrying over time. At the turn of the twentieth century, immigrants from Italy, Sweden, Finland, Scotland, and Ireland came to work in the shipyards and granite quarries, diversifying the original Yankee population. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Putnam's economy remained strong. It had a slightly lower unemployment rate (2.9 percent) than the neighboring big city (3.3 percent) and the state as a whole (3.2 percent); many Putnam residents have attended some college or have a bachelor's degree.

By the mid-1980s, large numbers of Asian immigrants had begun to arrive, altering Putnam's demographics. In 1980, there were sixty-four students in the city's English as a Second Language/Transitional Bilingual Education (ESL/TBE) program, representing 0.6 percent of the total school population. Twenty years later, there were 996 students in the program citywide, representing almost 11 percent of the total student population. The district offers bilingual programs for Cantonese speakers (now 60 per-

cent of all ESL students) and Vietnamese speakers (now 14 percent of all ESL students), to comply with the state's mandate for bilingual education.

During our study, the student body of the school was 55.9 percent white (versus 77.1 percent statewide), and approximately 40.6 percent of students were Asian (compared with 4.2 percent across the state). African Americans represented a smaller share of total enrollment in Putnam than in the state as a whole (1.4 percent in Putnam versus 8.6 percent statewide); Hispanics also represented a smaller share (1.4 percent in Putnam versus 10 percent statewide). Thirty-seven percent of all students at Putnam were eligible for free lunch.

Let's set the scene. Built in the mid-1950s, Putnam Middle School is a plain, boxy, two-story yellow-brick structure surrounded by athletic fields. The school door stays locked, and students enter en masse when the doors open in the morning. Visitors must ring the doorbell and identify themselves through an intercom before the door is electronically unlocked and entry to the school is granted. These security measures seem excessive, given the tranquility of the school's surroundings: the neighborhood looks neat, trim, and orderly. Adjacent blocks contain modest single-family homes on small, tidy lawns; the streets are empty of people.

Entering the school building, we step into a wide central space, bright from the light reflecting off shiny, stone-colored floors. A red-brick wall to the right displays a banner made from brightly colored pieces of felt that reads "Student Alliance against Racism." To the left, a freestanding partition displays pages of student poetry and artwork on its three tall walls. This central space is the hub into which flow the school's corridors and stairwell. Just off this central space is the main office, where all visitors to the school must check in. Receptionists sit behind a long counter running the length of the office, greeting visitors with a polite hello and courteous inquiries into the purpose and nature of their visit. Visitors are asked to sign the logbook.

The office is in a constant bustle as student helpers run about fetching and sorting, teachers hurry in to check their mailboxes or make photocopies, and guests mill around near the counter or sit expectantly in chairs by the door.

With 580 young adolescents in the building, the noise rises to a deafening level when students change classes. Students pour out of classrooms, some walking quickly and others bolting through the corridors. They have only two minutes to rush to their lockers, exchange hasty greetings with friends, and arrive at their next classes. The air is filled with shouts, laughter, and taunts, punctuated by the slamming of locker doors.

During those boisterous breaks, we often see the principal or assistant principal directing traffic, issuing firm orders to students to walk not run, or standing in intense conversation with a student, giving a stern lecture about the use of rude or foul language. At the start of each class period, when the halls are suddenly drained, the quiet hum of muffled voices murmurs through closed doors. The hallway floors shine; they are amazingly free of debris. Walls of glazed tile and brick reflect light through the corridors, which are decorated with boards displaying student artwork. Several photo collages of former students line the wall across from the main office. Along one corridor, the walls are covered by large painted murals depicting figures and backdrops from stage musicals such as *Oliver Twist.*

At precisely 11:30 each morning, students line up outside the cafeteria doors before they pour into the large, bright, clean room with tall ceilings and bright lights overhead. Clear rules and a strong teacher presence keep lunch in the cafeteria organized and under control. The room buzzes with hundreds of conversations, but it remains orderly as students patiently line up for food or sit at their tables eating and chatting. Teachers stand throughout the room, their firm yet warm presence helping to maintain order and ensuring that students dispose of their trash properly.

In the cafeteria, we find that students segregate not only by race and ethnicity, but also by gender. Asian students tend to cluster with other Asians, while white students cluster together. In both groups, girls and boys tend to sit separately from one another. One table might have only Asian boys, another only white girls.

On the second floor, above the cafeteria, is the school's library, called the "media center." Low bookcases define different spaces within the bright, inviting room. Books fill the shelves, colorful educational material lines the walls, and there are a couple of TV monitors on wheeled stands. In the middle of the room is a cluster of rectangular and circular tables surrounded by low metal chairs with smooth glazed seats. The school's staff of approximately fifty teachers and staff can fit quite comfortably around the tables in the center space; indeed, we were asked to give a presentation about our project to the staff here. The media center is a colorful, comfortable, and welcoming space used by staff and students alike.

Across the hall from the media center is a smaller classroom filled with computers. About ten brand-new iMac computers with green translucent covers sit on desks around the edges of the room. In our visits to the school the previous year, we had seen ESL students learn to use computers in this space under the direction of a young math teacher, Julie Masseratti. Using grant money she had been awarded, the teacher helped the mostly Asian students learn not only to navigate pull-down menus and save and edit word-processing files, but also to create their own on-screen scrapbooks of photos and text illustrating different aspects of their identity. Masseratti would walk around the room, offering gentle support and encouragement to the contemplative students busy writing at their stations. These immigrant students wrote creative pieces about their best friends in China, their favorite activities in the United States, how they felt about their families, and their feelings about their new country and their native countries. Masseratti's goal was to offer limited-English students another form of self-expression while teaching them basic computer skills; the project was a great success.

On a frigid yet sunny day in early winter, we entered an art class in a room on the second floor of the school where a number of our student participants were working. The walls were decorated with posters, artwork, and reproductions of famous paintings. The room was clean and organized, and a radio played soft music in the background. Some twenty students worked quietly and autonomously on their drawings. Everyone appeared deeply engaged in the work. Once in a while, students looked up to ask a question or chat softly. The art teacher greeted us warmly and walked around the tables, giving thoughtful suggestions and encouraging each student. Her demeanor was kind yet authoritative: this was a woman in total control of her class. At one point, she called the students' attention to the front of the room and reviewed different genres and styles of art that spanned several different eras and cultures. One by one, she described how each student's drawing reflected some of these significant genres and themes. This teacher was able to engage her students both in producing their own artwork and in thinking about broader artistic themes. She made thoughtful connections between her students' works and master works, thus elevating her students' efforts and achievements. We observed how comfortable many of the Asian immigrant students seemed to be in this class. It was a place where speaking English was not always necessary, where the students could express their talents and receive praise.

The principal, Maria Bonaso, is a no-nonsense granddaughter of Italian immigrants who worships at the altar of education. She has a clear sense of her mission—"student learning and engagement" is her mantra, one she used in nearly every exchange we had with her, formal and informal. This small but powerful woman seems to be everywhere at once. During class transitions, she is in the hallways, telling students to walk or tuck in their shirts, or wishing them good luck on a test. During lunch periods, she is in the cafeteria. When we wish to speak with her, we have to schedule appointments, and as time goes by, we learn that it is best to catch her while she is walking around the halls. We often saw Mrs. Bonaso standing in the middle of a hallway before a line of teachers waiting to speak with her: she made herself available to teachers and students alike. She is warm, firm, and utterly in control.

At the end of one school day, we watched as Mrs. Bonaso stood outside, shepherding students toward the buses that had pulled up by the school's entrance. Mrs. Bonaso waved to a bus driver; the next moment, she told a bunch of rowdy students to watch their language; and in the next, she rolled her eyes and shot a fleeting smile at a passing teacher. We tried asking her a question, but suddenly she darted across the schoolyard, intent on picking up trash. All the while, she called out to loitering students, telling them it was time to go home.

With never a moment to spare, Mrs. Bonaso makes it her business to know exactly what is going on in her school. A hands-on administrator and focused leader, she is curious about current research and thoughtful about new initiatives outside the school. She expressed generous support for our research project, and early on invited us to present it to the teachers and staff.

If its principal sets Putnam Middle School's intellectual agenda and climate, the school's bilingual counselor, Cindy Cheng, shapes the immigrant students' emotional lives. Ms. Cheng is the principal's right-hand woman; the two have now worked together for eleven years. Ms. Cheng is herself an immigrant: she was a schoolteacher in Hong Kong before coming to the United States. When she first started working at Putnam she was a bilingual education teacher, but eventually she became the guidance counselor

for most of the school's foreign-language and immigrant students. Today she is a major figure in the school. She is one of three guidance counselors on staff, and the only one who speaks Chinese in a school where 20 percent of the student body is of Asian descent. In five elementary schools across the city, she assists parents with their concerns and counsels Asian students who have limited English-language proficiency.

Because she is such a key person, Ms. Cheng has her own office on the first floor of the building. It is decorated with photos of current and former students, thank-you and Valentine's Day cards, and handwritten or photocopied inspirational phrases, such as "Well-begun is half done" and "It is never too late to learn." A hanging wind chime bears the message: "Love is Gentle, Love is Kind." A list of values is written across a whiteboard, and some of these words are circled: honesty, kindness, friendship, good grades.

Students stop by her office throughout the day. Some ask her to sign a form; others ask her to help straighten out a scheduling problem; still others come by merely because her office is welcoming, a place where Asian students find a kind, gentle adult who talks to them in their own language. Once, when we were in her office, Ms. Cheng called out a hearty hello to two Asian boys as they walked by. When they came in to greet her, she complimented them on their new haircuts. She turned to us and said how "gwei"—good, sweet, and well-behaved—these students are. The boys smiled. She noticed that one of the boys, a recent immigrant from Vietnam, had very chapped lips. Concerned, she asked if he had any lip balm. Speaking no English and only a little Cantonese, he shyly nodded yes; she patted him on the shoulder and sent the two off. No small detail seems to escape Ms. Cheng's kind attention.

When Ms. Cheng is in her office, she usually is catching up on administrative work, speaking with parents on the telephone, or counseling students who have come by to look for her. Occasionally she meets with Asian parents who come in with various concerns. But more often we found her in the hallways, moving from one classroom to another, surrounded by Asian students. She meets with the school's ESL teachers each week and monitors student performance. She mentors the new Chinese-speaking ESL teacher, offering advice and helping with assignments. She believes that the Chinese students should maintain their written Chinese language as they are learning English. She encourages the new Chinese ESL teacher to have the Chinese students keep a journal in Chinese. The new teacher cannot read or write Chinese, so she took it upon herself to read, correct, and write comments on the students' journal entries.

Because Ms. Cheng is conscientious and capable, the principal asks her to help with larger administrative tasks. Following the administration of the eighth-grade state standardized testing, both Mrs. Bonaso and Ms. Cheng were occupied with collecting and reviewing student answer sheets. They examined hundreds of student test booklets to ensure that basic identification information had been entered correctly.

Ms. Cheng works long hours, often well past regular school hours. One afternoon, she explained modestly that she is one of the first to arrive at the school each day and one of the last to leave. Parents have often asked her if she would tutor their children privately in English; she said that because she has to set some limits on her working hours, she has declined these requests. She does make herself available, however, to tutor students who are willing to come to school before classes begin.

Ms. Cheng also extends herself to help parents who have difficulty understanding or conducting personal affairs in English. Once she accompanied a new immigrant couple by subway to a downtown government office to assist them with their Social Security papers. In addition, we learned that Ms. Cheng plays a leading role in Asian student affairs throughout the city. Whenever Asian students get into fights or there is an issue involving Asian students, she is called in to help translate, interpret, and mediate.

Both inside and outside school, Ms. Cheng concerns herself with the moral and character development of her immigrant students and worries that they are subject to unhealthy cultural influences. She notes how many students remain unsupervised when they go home from school because most of their parents work long hours in restaurants, factories, or hotels in the city. Knowing that students watch a great deal of TV and have access to a wide range of information from the internet, she often lends students videotapes containing what she believes are more wholesome messages. These tapes include *The Sound of Music,* as well as Chinese-language dramas that focus on the importance of family relationships. A self-described Christian, Ms. Cheng attends church regularly and once organized a trip for Chinese students and parents to watch a play at the nearby Christian college.

At Putnam, the students range in age from eleven to fourteen. While

some claim to be dating or are seen flirting, most look awkward with or act uninterested in members of the opposite sex. Chinese girls seek each other out in the hallways or congregate in the cafeteria, speaking Cantonese. Boys, too, sit and talk with each other in Chinese—sometimes alternating among the more widely spoken Cantonese and other dialects such as Fukienese or Taisanese. Only those Asian students who have lived in the United States for many years or who take mainstream classes seem to have interactions with the white students in the school. On a day we visited, two Asian girls who were not taking ESL classes sat with a group of white girls in the cafeteria. The Asian girls and their white counterparts dressed and spoke alike. They talked about pop stars and sat at the opposite end of the table from several ESL girls who discussed what they would wear for their school choir concert that evening.

Ms. Cheng told us that while the school has its racial tensions, they are subdued. Bullying is an occasional problem however, with white American students aggressively accosting Asian students. She noted that white students complain about Asian students who speak in their native languages; the white students fear that the Asians are saying bad things about them. Ms. Cheng also noted the tensions among ESL students from different countries. For example, some Albanian students become irritated and resentful when Chinese students speak to each other in a language that other ESL students cannot understand. Some Chinese students have also complained, asking Vietnamese students not to speak in Vietnamese.

New students from overseas who enter the school district attend a city-wide registration session, held every Monday and Thursday at the district's pupil personnel service office. There they take tests that assess their English proficiency. Those assessed as having limited English proficiency are assigned to schools with ESL classes to serve them. Putnam Middle School is the only one of four junior high schools in the city with an ESL program.

At Putnam, ESL classes are divided into three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. When a new student arrives, Ms. Cheng studies the results of the English proficiency test and information about the student's background. She assembles the student's schedule, provides the student with a school orientation, introduces the student to his or her teachers, and holds an initial meeting with the parents. Throughout the year, the three ESL teachers and Ms. Cheng meet weekly to discuss individual students' progress and to decide whether to move specific students into more advanced ESL or mainstream classes. Such moves usually occur after report cards are issued. At the end of each year, students take an English proficiency test that helps teachers gauge their progress.

Asian parents typically want their children moved into regular education classes as soon as possible, Ms. Cheng said. Some of the more assertive parents insist that their children be moved into regular classes immediately, even if their English is limited. Many parents know little English themselves and want their children to help the family by learning English as quickly as they can. To ensure that their children maintain fluency in Chinese, many parents send their children to Chinese schools on the weekends.

Ms. Cheng noted that some students, including some who were born in the United States, spend years in ESL classes. Many teachers have questioned this practice and blame the ESL program for fostering it, fearing that students will become dependent on their native languages and escape learning English. Ms. Cheng said that many of these children live in households and communities in which only Chinese is spoken. They have little exposure to English outside school; with little chance to practice outside the classroom, they make little progress. Most students want to leave the ESL program as soon as possible, she said. Those who stay longer than three years tend to feel "no good" about their schoolwork; only "lazy students" want to linger in the program because it is easier, she said.

Much of classroom ethos depends on teacher character and style. At Putnam, Chinese students in the beginning ESL class were often talkative and inattentive, sometimes rude. These students may have felt emboldened because they knew that the teacher understood Chinese and because Chinese students were a majority in the class. Others may have acted up because the teacher was new—fresh out of college and unsure of herself.

In a mainstream social studies class with a majority of white students, an older white male teacher stood at the front of the room, commenting on a video about ships. The white American students ignored the teacher's questions, making rude comments and turning their backs to him. Two Asian girls read at their desks, paying no attention to the video, while three Asian boys chatted quietly in a corner. One white girl read a novel, while another emptied the contents of her purse on her chair before slowly putting each item back, one by one. Ms. Cheng told us that this teacher often evaded real instruction by showing videos, which bored the students. The

day we sat in his class, he appeared unconcerned or oblivious to the students' inattention or to their facetious replies to his questions.

Yet in other classes, students were fully engaged and absorbed. In a reading class, a young white teacher filled the class period with participatory and collaborative activities. She began with a few minutes of free writing while classical music played from a radio in the corner. She used an ingenious strategy to help develop attention and respect in the classroom. She would ask a question about the week's reading, then throw a fuzzy ball to whoever raised a hand. It was a rule that the rest of the class gave its full attention to whoever held the ball. She followed the question-and-answer period with short, competitive activities in which student teams took turns challenging each other to define vocabulary words. The class ended with a small-group activity during which groups worked together to prepare a skit on the book they were reading that they would perform for the rest of the class. The class generally was characterized by respectful and thoughtful interchanges between the teacher and the students.

Other teachers were also able to manage the students and gain their affection and respect. The same students who were loud and unruly in the beginning ESL class were obedient and attentive in the ESL tutor's class. This tutor was a middle-aged white woman with a kind but firm manner. Only those students who appeared to need the most help with their English were pulled out of their ESL classes to attend sessions with the tutor. She typically gave the class simple, entry-level worksheets with pictures of basic terms, such as items found in the house or in nature. She would ask the students to color the objects according to different criteria: yellow for objects that began with an "h," blue for objects that began with a "p," and so on. Students talked quietly to each other in their native languages to find the right answers or to exchange crayons. Strolling around the tables and attending to students' hesitant English, she maintained an engaged, quiet, and relaxed atmosphere in the class.

Another teacher who was able to keep her students' attention was the young, white, advanced-ESL teacher. She appeared to be in her thirties and led her class with the firm manner of a sports coach, as well as with a warm sense of humor. Like the young reading teacher, this teacher filled her classes with a mix of writing, drawing, and discussion exercises to keep the students engaged. During one class, she showed a short video of a musical reenactment of the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Joking with the class about the silliness of the songs, she followed the video with a serious question-and-answer session about the historical figures and activities surrounding that event. Like the reading teacher, she had high expectations for her students and expected them to hand in their homework on time.

Putnam has support groups and programs that promote student achievement and social development. These include a morning homework center, a peer-mediation program that teaches conflict-resolution skills, and a program called "Making it in Putnam," which aims to promote students' self-esteem, attendance, and achievement. A student organization called Alliance against Racism, whose colorful banner hangs in the central hub of the building, meets weekly with staff advisers to discuss issues of racism and violence. The school sponsors an International Week that celebrates its diversity.

With grant funding, the school offers tutoring for state-mandated tests both after school and on Saturdays. Another grant-funded program offers computer classes for teachers in partnership with a nearby college. The school also works with the local YMCA to provide extracurricular programs for students, such as street hockey, babysitting courses, and "Mountain Movers," which takes students on Saturday bike trips into the hills nearby. A glance at one of the school's brochures reveals other school partnerships. One program focuses on teaching about the New England coastline; another brings seventh-grade students to an Outward Bound camp experience on the shore. A partnership with the local newspaper allows students to learn about journalism and newspaper production, and a collaboration with the local police department teaches students about the dangers of drugs.

Extracurricular life at Putnam is rich and varied. Listed among the school's club activities are a language club, a nature club, the student council, the school yearbook, and a literary magazine. The main office displays recent issues of the magazine, which has won awards and national recognition from teacher groups. Other activities include the school chorus, band, a drama program, and a dance ensemble. School sports include soccer, swimming, wrestling, volleyball, basketball, and track and field.

A recent policy change that Cindy Cheng tells us has troubled Putnam's faculty is the institution of the controversial new statewide test. Results from the spring 1999 test showed that the school performed very close to

average levels across the state.[29] Most teachers in the school say that preparation for the eighth-grade test gobbles up valuable class time. Moreover, the test worries Ms. Cheng. She fears that many of her immigrant students will fail the exam because their English skills are still at basic levels.[30] Both she and the principal fear that low scores among ESL students will affect the students and the school. As it turns out, 67 percent of the students performed at or above proficiency on the high-stakes English language arts test. This is a considerably higher rate than most of the schools in which we conducted research.

Over the course of our ethnographic work at Putnam, we watched the school adapt to the growing influx of Asian immigrant students. This change is occurring at a majority white school where students have expressed unease with foreign languages and cultures. Despite tensions, the school allows students to express their different backgrounds and encourages them to learn from each other's diversity. This approach is apparent between classes and during each lunch hour, when students in the hallways or cafeteria freely speak in a variety of languages. It is also apparent through school-sponsored events like International Week, when students bring in food from their native lands and put on performances that share elements of their cultures.

The school administration has carefully built a well-structured and functioning school environment by establishing and enforcing a climate aimed at promoting learning. The school's dominant narrative is student engagement, and most teachers, staff, and students seem to have internalized the idea. Engagement, learning, and school achievements are ritually celebrated in public events, classrooms, and hallways. The principal plays a visible role in enforcing clear rules, and many of the school's teachers follow her lead. Within individual classrooms, students receive quality instruction using multiple teaching and learning strategies. With an active and attentive school administration, the school as a whole challenges most of its students to grow both socially and academically.

For immigrant students, who face some of the greatest challenges, the school provides valuable support. Three ESL teachers in a structured ESL sequence help students learn both the English language and American culture, while Cindy Cheng is an ever-present source of kind help and sure guidance to students, teachers, and parents. In the end, too, the students have each other. The school has welcomed so many Asian immigrant children that most can find friends who share the same background and language. Chinese immigrant students who face difficulties with English or with schoolwork have a good chance of finding ethnic peers with whom they can communicate easily and who share the experiences of adjusting to life in a new country.

Monroe High School

"Monroe" is one of Boston's most historic neighborhoods. Originally settled in the 1620s, Monroe was incorporated into Boston in 1874. Situated on a small peninsula between two important rivers, its citizens figured prominently in the making of early colonial America. The attractive architecture of this historic neighborhood includes Federal, Greek Revival, and Queen Anne styles. During World War II, its navy yard employed 50,000 workers.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Irish workers escaping the potato famine of the 1840s settled in Monroe in large numbers, driving the earlier English Protestant settlers to the suburbs. Today, a "townie" identity still dominates the ethos of Monroe. Beyond the original English-Irish tensions, this "townie" identity has been reinforced by the relative isolation of this special peninsula neighborhood from the greater city. It is not uncommon for people from other neighborhoods to believe that Monroe is a separate town altogether.

The neighborhood today is divided into two sections: one is elegant, with many chic restaurants, stylish boutiques, and beautiful old-fashioned streetlights. Its less-graceful section features potholed streets, rundown mom-and-pop grocery stores, and old triple-decker homes with beat-up paint jobs inhabited by a mostly working-class and low-income population. There we find the Monroe Housing Development, one of the first housing developments in the United States and the largest in the city. It has 1,108 public-housing units; to live there, tenants pay approximately 30 percent of their income in rent.

Monroe's Irish have historically had tense relations with black and Italian neighbors in nearby towns. Its homogeneous white population has also been cold to newcomer immigrants of color. According to the 2000 census, Monroe's racial composition is nearly 90 percent white, with residents who have mostly Irish, English, and Italian ancestry. There are very few blacks,

Asians, or Hispanics. In fact, in 1988, the city's housing authority began to desegregate the developments by assigning more blacks to Monroe's housing development, but the locals resisted. In 1996, the U.S. attorney filed a civil action suit against the housing authority for failing to investigate, protect, and take action to solve discrimination and harassment against thirteen tenants from Trinidad, Haiti, Nigeria, and St. Thomas, and others who were Latino and African American. The tenants complained that their white neighbors had harassed them with racist graffiti, physical violence, threats of physical violence, and destruction of property. Racial tensions are common throughout Monroe.

Monroe High School sits right next to the huge housing development. It is an imposing five-story building with the capacity to hold 1,230 students. The school was restructured in the 1990s but was on probation for three years, until early 1999, when it was fully reaccredited. As the principal explained to us, the school is divided into the Upper School and the Lower School. The Lower School (ninth and tenth grades), comprising four "units," is independent and can set its own academic emphasis and schedule. The Upper School (eleventh and twelfth grades) consists of school-to-career pathways, such as communication technology, law and justice, finance and economics, and conference and events planning, in addition to the core courses. Today, the school is 41 percent black, 30 percent Latino, 20 percent Asian, and 9 percent white. Sixty percent of the students qualify for free or reduced school lunch, and 50 percent of the students come from homes where English is not the first language. Eighty percent fail the annual high-stakes state test of English language arts. Only a small percentage go on to four-year colleges.

A large, litter-strewn ramp leading to the main door dominates the entrance. Just inside, someone is stationed at a small desk, but does not seem especially interested in either welcoming visitors or challenging them. We often observed the ostensible monitor reading a newspaper, talking on the phone, or listening to sports on the radio. As often as not, we walked right past the desk and directly into the classrooms without anyone greeting us, requesting identification, or asking about the nature of our visit.

On our first few visits, we find the secretaries in the main office rude. They make us wait, sometimes for entire class periods, before considering our request for directions or helping us make an appointment with the principal. As they get to know us, they warm up, but we cannot help wondering how parents must feel about this reception when they first come to the school.

The hallways have no student artwork hanging on the walls, no decorations celebrating student achievements, no references to athletics or special events. The walls are bare, save for some barely painted-over graffiti that reads "Fuck you." We find our way to one of the two stairwells, which is littered with trash. Students who are skipping class, usually in groups of two or three, congregate on the stairs to hang out—and to deal drugs, drink, and gamble.

Across the street, connected to the main building by an elevated pedestrian bridge, are a modern auditorium and the school's gymnasium. The athletic facility is well kept, with a roofed basketball court, two volleyball courts, a pool, and a large outdoor football field. Sports are a priority at Monroe; students, we are told by a proud coach, often choose the school for its renowned teams. A Dominican student explains that he chose the school because he wanted to play professional baseball. The courts are the only place in the school where we see students of all races and nationalities, immigrant and native-born alike, come together amicably.

The library, in the main building, is organized and well maintained. It boasts a large collection of English books, but books in other languages are conspicuous by their absence. The librarian says that although she asked the bilingual teachers to choose Spanish and Chinese books for the library collection, they did not respond. The principal tells us that the school's budget for books is minuscule. Moreover, he says, 85 percent of the books in the library have never been checked out. Students visit the library primarily to use the computers; once in a while, we see students studying there. Part of the reason the library is so rarely used may be its irregular hours: it doubles as a classroom and opens only when classes are scheduled there.

The school cafeteria is big and, unlike the rest of the school, clean. During lunch, teachers attempt to maintain order by shouting at their charges. Teachers and staff eat in their own space—a small room next door to the cafeteria where they can escape from students.

We dread going into the bathrooms. The odor is overwhelming. The stalls rarely have toilet paper; soap is a luxury. We learn to bring our own paper and soap when we visit. Because bathrooms are regularly the site of drug dealing and fighting, they are under surveillance.

We rarely see the principal, David Lee, interacting informally with students. He comes across as remote, cold, and brusque. Students complain that he does not know them, that he screams a lot, and that he is careless and arbitrary with discipline. One Dominican student confides that he has no respect for Mr. Lee, explaining, "He doesn't even remember the names of students who he has disciplined." In one case, we're told, Mr. Lee forgot that he was going to suspend a student and passed her without comment in the hall the very next day.

The immigrant students avoid the ineffectual Mr. Lee but are drawn to the competent and caring Monica Sandrini, a young Dominican woman and a proud recent graduate of a nearby Ivy League school. As the school's only Spanish bilingual counselor, she was overworked the instant she started working at the school, but she has become an important source of emotional support for the many immigrant students who gravitate to her. She remains highly invested in their emotional and academic well-being. Before Miss Sandrini joined the staff, we saw no signs of basic supportive services for immigrant students, such as bilingual tutoring services or preparation for TOEFL, the Test of English as a Foreign Language that nonnative speakers must take as part of their college applications. Eventually she organized and ran an after-school program that tutored immigrant students. Two of the students in our study named her as one of the most important people in their lives. She even helped one of our participants find housing. Soon word got out among many of the white mainstream students, too, that she was the person to go to for real help: many who had been assigned other guidance counselors went to Miss Sandrini for help with their college applications.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

Early efforts to desegregate the city's schools sparked fierce battles, most famously in Monroe. The city's desegregation was implemented in two phases, though these efforts did not affect Monroe High until phase 2 began in 1975. With strong opposition to "forced busing," the community banded together through its local committee on education to voice—and act on—its disagreement with the desegregation order. While not all residents shared the antibusing sentiment, most did. Protesters took to the streets, and tension grew between outsiders imposing the ruling and the community. In anticipation of violent outbreaks on the first day of busing, a convoy of police officers followed the school bus, filled mostly with black children, to the school. Those images flashed around the country, leaving indelible marks on the city's, and particularly Monroe's, image and identity.

Soon after, white residents who could afford to moved to other towns or enrolled their children in more expensive, often Catholic, private schools. But even before busing, teachers and staff had believed that Monroe High drew the town's weakest students. Busing, many teachers told us, only aggravated the situation.

At Monroe High today, whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians occupy separate social spaces. Immigrant students, mostly Latinos and Chinese, are relegated to the bilingual program. Decades-old patterns of distrust and mutual disdain continue. Tension and disrespect permeate the school environment. At best, students from different groups pointedly avoid each another. Daily, we hear taunting and racial epithets and see pushing and bullying. Fighting and threats of violence are ever-present. Only on the school's sports teams do students from different groups work together congenially.

Administrators barely address these overt tensions, denying that racially motivated fights occur with any frequency. We see no systematic attempts to deal constructively with the violence and noted several incidents of bullying that adult bystanders simply ignored. According to one white teacher who is seemingly oblivious to the evident tensions, "This generation of children is used to being together."

The bilingual teachers and counselors are more attuned to the school's complex racial dynamics. A counselor explains that white students, who over the years have been outnumbered by minority students, tend to hang out together. A bilingual teacher notes: "The white kids have a feeling of privilege and entitlement, like how they walk around the hallways. They have their own little space in the corridors and they walk like they are the kings. But the real power is in the black kids." Another bilingual teacher sums it up this way: "There is a clear and visible racial divide among students, whereby blacks and Latinos, Asians, and whites hang out separately. Even when there are not violent outbreaks, there is clear separation and mistrust."

The forbidding racial dynamics adversely affect students who have friends from different ethnic backgrounds. A Dominican student tells us

that her Latina friends pick on her because she hangs out with the black girls. A white student says that having a Latino boyfriend led to tension with her friends. Several students explain to us that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans do not get along, because Puerto Ricans, who tend to be lighter-skinned, "think they are better." As a Dominican student tells us, relationships are "awful between *Boricuas* [Puerto Ricans] and Dominicans. My Dominican friends talk about the Puerto Ricans, and don't like me being friends with them." This student describes the divide between Dominicans and whites: "Some white students are very racist. They hate Dominicans, and Dominicans do not get along with whites."

FEAR AS THE DOMINANT ETHOS

Personal safety is a theme of conversations with students and staff alike. All define their school experience around the fear of violence: when to be afraid (going to and from school), how to cope with fear (always walk in groups), where it is safe (bilingual classrooms), and where it is especially dangerous (the stairways). A parent volunteer notes, "Students disrespect each other and many of the teachers and staff members, and [I have seen] students screaming and hitting at each other and calling each other derogatory names." Pushing, shoving, and punching are routine in the hallways, the stairways, and on the way to and from school. Weapons are not uncommon.

On a cold February afternoon in 1999, one Vietnamese student stabbed another. It happened the day of the school's Valentine's Dance, on the eve of a school vacation. In a pattern that we came to associate with the management of violence at Monroe High, the school dance was abruptly cancelled. Students were told that the disc jockey had pulled out at the last minute. Instead of initiating a dialogue about the trauma and consequences of this horrific incident of school violence, the administration chose instead to dissemble. The students, of course, knew very well what had really happened and were outraged by the administration's lie.

One afternoon, walking down the stairways, we witnessed a fight involving two African American girls and two Latina girls. The girls were hitting, punching, and kicking one another, surrounded by a shrieking crowd. A teacher standing a few steps away reacted by screaming, "That's enough!" When the fighting continued, the teacher approached the group, still screaming, "That's enough!" The fighting stopped, and the group drifted down the stairway as though nothing had happened. The teacher, too, walked away. There was no discussion. There were no consequences.

During our interviews, the boys in particular commented on the tension between the blacks in the mainstream courses and the Latinos in the bilingual program. Fourteen-year-old Leonardo, a Central American immigrant, said the constant conflict between blacks and Hispanics made him feel unsafe. Another student explained that the *tigradas* (a Dominican term for fights) in the stairways worried him. He added, "This year more than last year because more blacks have entered [the school]."

Girls, too, worried about the racial tensions. Thirteen-year-old Norma, from the Dominican Republic, said, "I think the blacks are racist with the Latinos . . . they used to scream at me and tell me ugly things." Another student, twelve-year-old Stefany, described the following incident: "A few weeks ago during gym class, a friend of mine from the bilingual program slapped a girl from the regular program because they were talking badly about them. Regular students want us to speak English, and we tell them to learn Spanish. Those kids, the only thing they know in Spanish are bad words and they say them to get into fights. But one has to ignore them." In general, though, girls were less likely than boys to report feeling besieged. As a twelve-year-old Dominican girl said, "It is safer for me because it's boys who want trouble and get into trouble."

Another source of anxiety at Monroe High is the fire-alarm system. Not long after September 11, 2001, when tensions were running high, a cherry bomb exploded, and in an orchestrated prank, three different fire alarms sounded simultaneously, causing chaos throughout the building. From then on, teachers were posted in the hallways, sometimes trying to conduct their classes while keeping an eye on the alarms, sometimes meeting or doing their prep work. After the prank, there were always three or four school guards walking the halls, moving the students between classes, and following them up and down the stairs. In spite of the new surveillance, we still saw students cutting classes, wandering in the halls, and hiding from adults in the stairwells.

Students said that vandalism sometimes triggered racial tension. A Central American student complained that Latino students were always blamed: "One day someone set a fire in the stairway between the fourth and the fifth floor. Everything could have blown up. They blamed us [Latinos], even though we were on a field trip and did not do it. They blamed the

Hispanic students because they found a Goya can [Goya is a brand sometimes associated with Latinos]."

Increased surveillance made the students feel safer, but also oppressed. As a fourteen-year-old Dominican student confided: "It's more safe now. There's a lot of police now. It's good . . . but it's also annoying because you can't play or anything. They've become too serious, always watching over you." At first, interactions between students and the new guards were surprisingly relaxed. Students approached guards in a spontaneous, friendly manner, seeming respectful and appreciative. Over time, however, the guards' constant presence elicited other feelings. "It feels like a jail in here," one student said during the last year of the study. A parent volunteer added, "The students feel they are always being watched, as if they are ready to commit crimes—so much so that many students simply want to get out of there."

Fear and violence followed the students home from school. Many said they felt especially vulnerable on their way home, when drinking, drugs, beatings, and robberies were common. A staff member shared her concerns about a fight that was supposed to take place between two rival gangs after school one day, an event she was anxiously trying to avert. Though individual teachers sometimes tried to get involved, we were struck by a culture of administrative silence regarding violence in and out of school. As a thirteen-year-old Dominican student said with resignation in her voice: "De eso no se habla" (We don't talk about that).

BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

Relations between the bilingual and mainstream teachers and administrators are another source of division at Monroe High. While bilingual teachers often feel irrelevant to the school's larger mission, mainstream teachers tend to see them as sheltered and overindulged, with special privileges that include smaller student-to-teacher ratios. As in many of the other schools in which we conducted fieldwork, the bilingual staff describe the Latino and Asian teachers as "warmer" and "more caring" toward immigrant students, while characterizing mainstream teachers as "cold, harsh, and tense." Over the years, and not just at Monroe High, we often saw Latino immigrant students greet teachers with kisses and hugs, whereas with mainstream white teachers, they were more formal and distant. The language barrier and different interpersonal styles seem to hamper relationships between mainstream teachers and staff and the immigrant students. One bilingual teacher, for example, felt that the white cafeteria workers were impatient and rude when immigrant students had trouble understanding them.

The school has had a well-established Chinese bilingual program since 1979 and a Spanish bilingual program since 1981. It offers literacy classes aimed at those newly arrived students who come with limited schooling. In the literacy classrooms, basic reading and writing skills are taught in English.

Over the years of our study, the structure and personnel in Monroe High's bilingual program changed. During our third year of fieldwork, the bilingual faculty consisted of two counselors (one Latino and one Chinese), seven ESL teachers, six Chinese teachers, and five Spanish-speaking bilingual teachers, along with one Spanish bilingual aide. The director of the bilingual program was a Chinese woman. By 2000, there were 115 Spanish and two hundred Chinese-speaking students. The Chinese group had an almost equal mix of Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. The bilingual program had four levels, ESL I (for students with the lowest level of proficiency) to ESL IV (for students with the greatest competence). Placement depended on the score on a language proficiency exam, and students were expected to move out of the bilingual program in three years.

Though the bilingual program prided itself on offering electives that mingle bilingual and mainstream students, those electives were open only to students in the top two levels. Students at lower levels were assigned additional ESL skill classes, leaving no room in their schedules for electives. Sports remained the only activity that routinely brought bilingual and mainstream students together. During the 1998–1999 school year, there were fourteen immigrant students on the soccer team, seven on the volleyball team, three on the swim team, and nine on the softball/baseball team.

The bilingual teachers told us that they received far less attention and fewer resources than the rest of the school. They reported that their program was marginalized, their students rendered invisible, and that they rarely met with the mainstream teachers. The head of the bilingual program used the word "ghetto" to describe the bilingual program and regularly cited what she considered evidence of second-class citizenship. When the position of the beloved bilingual counselor, Monica Sandrini, who so tirelessly and effectively advocated for her students, was cut for budgetary

reasons, the staff saw the move as yet another indication of the administration's lack of support for its growing numbers of immigrant students.

Monroe High School is characterized by raw contradictions. Despite its violence, barren walls, and filthy stairways, many students choose to attend because of its celebrated athletic program. It is a school in which academics are defined by the pressures of statewide testing, a place where few strive for scholastic excellence and where few adults seem to care about learning or mentoring. The bilingual program is the school's only refuge for newly arrived students, a place where students feel nurtured—where teachers advocate for them, and where, at least for a while, they have a skilled and loving counselor to look up to. Yet in another paradox, the cozy bilingual program offers academic rigor and leads to educational excellence for only a few of the Spanish-speaking students. The lack of a strong curriculum, and the struggle students face when they move out of the bilingual program, place many students at a high risk for eventual academic failure.

In this environment of squandered opportunities, however, immigrant students at Monroe who are not in the bilingual program may be at an even greater risk for academic failure and further social isolation.

Reade High School

Reade High School lies in a small city in Massachusetts. With a population of approximately 100,000, this city is home to two prestigious universities and two smaller colleges. Its residents are a combination of "town and gown" folk: many are academics in the universities, colleges, and research centers that abound in the area, while others have jobs that support the academic enterprise: janitors, clerical staff, and so on.

Reade became a single school in the 1970s upon the merger of two older schools, a vocational school and a classics-based high school founded in 1648. It is the only public high school in the city and serves slightly fewer than two thousand students. The student body, like the city, is diverse in class and race. The student population is 35.9 percent white, 41.7 percent African American (including foreign-born black, many of whom are Haitian), 14.4 percent Latino (many of them immigrants), and 7 percent Asian (again, many of whom are immigrants). About 22 percent of the students are classified as having limited English proficiency.

The school comprises two large buildings joined by a glass passageway. In the front is a large lawn that is shared by the municipal library next door. In the spring, we find students of many nationalities playing softball, Frisbee, and soccer there. In contrast to the library's colonial aesthetic, the high school's architecture is distinctly modern. There is a welcome sign at the entrance, next to a bulletin board listing upcoming trips, lectures, plays, and concerts. Entering the building, we are greeted by student art projects and photographs from recent field trips, carefully displayed in glass cases along the walls. The hallways are clean and the building is well maintained.

The main office buzzes with activity. The three secretaries, all middle-aged white women, simultaneously answer calls, direct visitors, and dispatch questions and complaints in a blur of voices and motion. The office seems efficient and courteous, if not particularly warm and welcoming.

Rarely is anyone seated at the security desk. The security guards usually walk the halls, chatting with teachers and students and keeping an eye out. Many are friendly, always ready to answer a question or give directions. Some issue directives to the students: "Take off your hat," "Get to class," "Settle down." A couple of the guards have warm relationships with their charges and know not just the students but also their families and the community.

The school cafeteria is spacious, inviting, and fairly quiet even at its busiest, when hundreds of energetic teenagers are chatting, joking, and rushing to get their lunches. Students of all races and many nationalities are, for the most part, friendly with each other and respectful toward the cafeteria employees and the watchful teachers and guards. Students clean up after themselves and leave calmly. During our five years in the school, we never witnessed a scuffle in the cafeteria, though they occasionally erupted in the hallways or in an area immediately outside the school.

The highly diverse student body of Reade generally coexists well. Unlike in many schools we observed, when fights erupt, they tend to be between students of the same racial groups rather than between students from different racial groups. On our visits, we saw a fair amount of what Beverly Daniel Tatum refers to as "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" behavior, but we also observed a number of mixed-group tables.[31] That is, students often group themselves by interest and shared activities—basketball or drama for example—in addition to the oft-encountered

racial segregation found in most schools. Immigrant students, especially the newly arrived, however, tend to keep separate from other students—perhaps in part because they do not fully feel comfortable with their English skills and in part because native-born students clearly have little interest in befriending them.

Many immigrant-origin students who have been in the United States for a number of years, however, do mix comfortably with native-born students. Second-generation Haitian students, for example, tend to dress and talk in ways that make them virtually indistinguishable from African American peers whose parents have been in the country for many generations. They often have friendships with other black students from a variety of backgrounds. The students who seem to have the most social difficulty are those who have not yet assumed a comfortably ethnic and racially hyphenated American identity yet are no longer a part of the "newcomer immigrant" group.

The bathrooms at Reade are clean and well maintained, with soap and toilet paper in good supply. Mirrors are intact, and the walls are free of graffiti, aside from a few romantic proclamations. During class time, the hallways are usually empty, except for the occasional student going to an office.

The school has several computer rooms, each one of which has been reassigned to one of its "houses," which are described later. There is a "writing center" staffed by a language-arts teacher, and most classrooms have computer stations with internet access. Several students and teachers have their own web pages. A technology-proficiency program is being designed; the goal is to make it a requirement for graduation.

The two-story library is large and well lit. The upstairs is reserved for teachers. Computer stations, most in frequent use, take up half of the downstairs space. Students come in during their study periods to work on projects, browse the internet, check e-mail, or simply chat with their friends. There are three full-time librarians and several part-time employees, some of them student aides. Funding for books and software comes from an allotment from the city public school system, grants from various technology companies in the vicinity, and from a discretionary fund managed by the principal. About 10 percent of the books are in languages other than English; in the world literature section, Spanish and French predominate. We see just a handful of books in Portuguese and none in Haitian Kreyol, though many students speak these languages. "We follow teachers' requests," Janice Klein, the senior librarian, says. "We have catalogs from [Haitian] publishing companies, but we don't know what to buy. There are no requests for Kreyol, not even for a dictionary."

During class time, students need a pass from their teachers to enter the library. After the last period of the day, the library fills with students doing homework, exchanging the day's gossip, and socializing until closing, an hour and a half later. The library staff does not seem to mind, though there is much shushing.

The school has after-school programs in athletics, arts, and cultural interests. For example, several Haitian students in our project belong to the Haitian club, which meets weekly. A Haitian teacher presides over the club, and its board is composed entirely of seniors, most of them second-generation immigrants.

Reade was completely restructured after the first of our five years of fieldwork there. In the culture of the school, everything is divided between the time "before" and the "after" this tumultuous period of restructuring.

"BEFORE"

From 1990 to June 2000, Reade was divided into five smaller learning communities—"schools within schools," referred to as "houses"—each with its own management structure, pedagogy, and curriculum. In freshman year, the students were placed in a house through a Byzantine process of "choice" and "lottery" and took most of their core courses in that house. Although the stated purpose of these separate houses was admirable—to "create smaller communities and respond to the individual needs of students," as an official pamphlet announced—there was a lamentable de facto segregation by race, income, and national origin among the houses. There was also a clear pattern of ability tracking.

The houses were physically separate, which made the school's segregation obvious. Walking from one building to another, or from one floor to another, was like visiting schools in different neighborhoods. In the hallways of the ESL-bilingual house, immigrant students chatted in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Kreyol, or Cape Verdean Creole. The floor that housed the "basic skills" house and special-education students was the most austere, least decorated, and most poorly maintained. The "traditional" house looked like what one would expect of an urban high school: a great deal of

public space was devoted to athletics; announcements on bulletin boards gave updates on forthcoming games and social events. Most striking was the "alternative" house, founded as a pilot school in the 1960s by an eminent psychologist to reflect his theories of morality. Sitting on the top floor, symbolically the jewel in the crown, it looked more like an art department in a private college than a public high school. Its walls were adorned with student projects on subjects such as science, theater, and community outreach. Students bustled about, working on projects or preparing presentations. Elaborate posters were displayed in a large common area. Students confidently called teachers—many of whom held doctorates from prestigious universities—by their first names. When the house was dismantled as part of the redesign, teachers, students, and parents alike were outraged, concerned, and sad. The alternative house was the only viable public school setting for families who could not afford to send their high-achieving children to one of the many private schools in the area.

Although the dismantling of the system brought much protest and resulted in the demise of a couple of vibrant and well-functioning houses, many teachers and students agreed that the distribution of students and academic achievement had previously been inequitable. Indeed, the number of students failing courses was vastly different among houses. In the alternative house (where 52 percent of the students were white), 21 percent of the students were failing a class each semester. In the basic-skills house (where only 37 percent were white), the failure rate was a whopping 51 percent. Only one of the immigrant students in our study was in the elite alternative house and, although she enjoyed being there, she complained about having little contact with her immigrant friends from other houses. She also recognized that she had much higher standards to meet: "I always have a project to research," she once said. "They"—her friends in other houses—"don't have as much homework."

When immigrant students "placed out" of the ESL-bilingual program into mainstream classes, they literally "crossed over" from one building to another in a sort of mini-migration. This crossing metaphor was not lost on the immigrant students, who looked to the "other side" with apprehension. Many ESL teachers were reluctant to send their immigrant students to the "other side," worrying that they would feel lost in what was seen as a cold and alien mainstream environment. Interestingly, many teachers in the other houses scorned the bilingual program for coddling the students and not allowing them, in the voice of one critic, "to sink or swim."

"AFTER"

The architect of Reade's restructuring, Ellen O'Leary, was controversial from the start. She took over Reade after the well-regarded principal of twenty-five years retired. Coming from the academic world, she had little sense of the school's culture or social structure. Brusque and arrogant, she imposed her redesign soon after her appointment, seeking little input from teachers, staff, parents, or students, and setting out to break up the school's "house" structure as fast as she could. Teachers and parents alike complained that O'Leary was tactless, authoritarian, and "undemocratic." Her decision to freeze out the highly educated parents who had been active in school affairs—many of them professors at local universities—was a strategic disaster. These parents, whose sense of entitlement includes close involvement in decisions affecting their children, were alienated and angry.

Teachers were frustrated that their input was scorned and skeptical that this reform would benefit the students. "The principal has good intentions," a seasoned teacher with a Ph.D. said, "but she will not achieve anything by antagonizing teachers. Our old house was a magnet program for Reade. Parents who can afford it will be taking their kids out and sending them to private schools." There were several heated meetings among parents, teachers, and the principal. Some teachers and administrators quit in protest. Many middle-class parents, as the teacher had predicted, voted with their feet and enrolled their children in prestigious private schools nearby. The top floor, formerly the alternative house, blended into the rest of the school. The energy and creativity that used to emanate from its hallways and classrooms vanished.

The school was now divided into five newly constituted houses, each serving approximately four hundred students, each with its own dean and teaching staff, and each with a cross-section of students of different abilities. In theory, the new houses promised to better integrate the school's highly diverse population. The principal said she hoped the better-prepared and most highly motivated students would raise the standards and increase the engagement of their peers. But the effect of the restructuring on the school's sense of itself seemed superficial. A full year after the

transition, the new schools had yet to name themselves. They continued to be called "School 1," "School 2," and so forth.

Before the old system was dismantled, Spanish, Haitian Kreyol, and Portuguese were spoken only in the hallways of the bilingual building. After the restructuring, the school felt more integrated; the sounds of immigrant languages penetrated every corner. But the immigrant students and staff from the bilingual program reported feeling lost in the new system. The abrupt changes had upset the treasured warmth and rhythm of the bilingual-ESL program. Teachers murmured that the system was dismantled precisely to stop bilingual students from connecting with each other and with the bilingual faculty. Their students shared this feeling. "We don't have our own house any more," one Haitian student told us sadly. "It's harder to see the other [bilingual] kids." Students who had been mainstreamed also complained about the change, which made it difficult for them to see their old teachers. Soon, however, students and teachers began finding new ways to recreate their old networks. "We have to make sure we can regroup," an ESL teacher said to us shortly before the end of the school year.

CREATING A SAFE PLACE AND FIGHTING INVISIBILITY

Although Reade is a large urban school, the environment was peaceful, compared with most of the schools we observed. Though fights occasionally broke out, they were rare and quickly resolved. Students seemed happy and well behaved. Regardless of race or class, many students favored the popular "urban hip-hop" look: boys wore baggy pants, oversized jackets, and expensive sneakers; some girls wore fashionable tight pants or short skirts and knee-high boots. The recently arrived immigrants usually looked less flashy, but the newcomers quickly learned to dress, walk, and talk as their American-born classmates did.

While most teachers were white Americans, many in the bilingual programs were immigrants, some European (Greek and Portuguese), and some South American or Haitian. Most of the adolescents we worked with during our sojourn at Reade were in the bilingual program and developed warm, strong relations with many of their teachers. The teachers grew involved with their students' academic and social lives. They considered themselves different from the mainstream teachers and, as mentioned earlier, sometimes kept students in the bilingual program to protect them

from the anonymity of the larger school. The teachers who largely worked with immigrant students often told us that they felt that the "real" mandate of the school was to focus on its large middle-class student body and that the immigrant students were generally invisible—an afterthought that only served to add color and spice.

The intentions behind the redesign effort—minimizing inequity and closing the achievement gap—were laudable. Unfortunately, Ellen O'Leary's leadership style alienated most everyone in the school community. She rarely met with students and communicated with the teachers mainly via officious, formal, written announcements and memos. She closed out parents who had considerable social capital and energy. As a result, she was not able to effectively lead her community of students, teachers, and parents to support her redesign efforts. After three years in which much was changed, though seemingly little for the better, Ms. O'Leary left her position as principal.

Relationships between Teachers and Immigrant Students and Their Families

What kinds of relationships exist between newcomer students and their teachers?

Students' View

Every year, through "the sentence completion task," one of our projective methods, we asked our participants to complete the sentence: "Teachers are . . ." These data reveal a very positive attitude toward teachers among newly arrived immigrant youth. Across the five years of the study, nearly three-quarters of the participants completed the sentence with positive answers such as "caring," "helpful," "people who respect others," "smart and understanding," "very nice to me and really helpful to me," and "perfect."

Even so, our students rarely named teachers or an adult at school as someone they would turn to for help (a role measured by what we call the "network of relations card sort task").[32] Only 10 percent of the students named a teacher as someone they would go to for help generally, and a mere 6 percent said they would go to teachers if they had a problem. Only

21 percent named a teacher as someone who respected them and an abysmal 3 percent named a teacher as someone who was proud of them. Surprisingly, especially given the challenges these students face in getting help with homework or accurate information about college access (as we described in Chapter 2), only 13 percent said they would ask teachers for help with homework. Only 28 percent indicated they would ask teachers or an adult at school for help in learning about how to get to college.

Some of our participants complained about the indifference and cultural insensitivity they experienced while interacting with some adults at their schools, including their teachers. Some of them spoke longingly about wanting closer and more understanding relationships with their teachers. Carl, a fourteen-year-old boy from China, reported: "Most of my teachers are quite cold. I wish they would care more about my feelings." Another student, in response to the question "How do teachers and administrators treat most students?" responded: "Not much. Teaching is just a job. Teachers just try to get by day by day and get salary at the end of the month, whether you learn things or not, it's not their business."

Teachers' Perspective on Immigrant Students

By and large, teachers reported liking the immigrant students precisely because they tended to arrive to the United States with behaviors that made classroom management easier.[33] As one teacher put it: "Immigrants have the desire to learn, are more disciplined, and value education." Many other teachers agreed with her:

> In working with immigrant children, you don't have the discipline problems that you would have working in a regular monolingual school, Many of immigrant children come with the cultures and the values of a strong, tight, family, and respect for elders that are taught early. They value education.

> I find that a lot of immigrant students were raised to be very focused on their studies.

> Recent immigrants kids are trying their best. They are aware that their parents have sacrificed a lot. They don't want to let it go to waste.

> Honestly, I'm like, why can't I have a class of only immigrant students? . . . Because if I only had to deal with this, I would be in heaven, because there are no discipline problems, I have never run into an discipline problem with them. So it's a pleasure.

Teachers often noted that immigrant students were more motivated than native-born peers attending the same school:

> There seems to be a motivation to do well because the [newcomer] student they look at it as an opportunity and they are going to make the most of it, but sometimes students who are second generation, or who are native born, they sometimes are not as motivated . . . So maybe some of the students from here take things for granted. [Immigrant students] look at it as a great opportunity and let's make the most of it, which makes my job easier; they work harder.

> You know, the immigrants, even though they don't have much education, they have such a willingness to learn—such a strong desire to learn.

> The immigrant students are the hungrier ones. They seem to be going for the awards and the academics where some of your mainstream students, or your traditional students, they are just taking their C and fleeing—you know?

Teachers report, however, that as the newcomer students acculturate—as they become more like their native-born peers—their behaviors begin to change for the worse.[34]

> In the beginning, immigrant kids are more respectful, more disciplined because of stricter schools they had in [their] home country. Later, as they become Americanized, which takes between 3 to 4 months to a year, they become unruly, Then they become like the American kids—they lack discipline and [do] things to get attention.

Our ethnographic data highlighted extensive differences between the newcomers and their native-born peers in a multiplicity of ways: from how they dress, to how they walk, to how they sit in classrooms. A perceptive principal mentioned how over they years he had noticed the profound changes especially as his immigrant students moved out of bilingual classrooms and into the monolingual environment. "The new immigrants show up in very formal dress—some of the boys from the Caribbean even wear white starched shirts during their first weeks in school. Everywhere you see them, they are carrying big sacks of books. But over time they get

the point. They become more Americanized. They begin by dressing differently—more hip, you see the boys wearing baggy pants and un-tucked shirts, sticking together, imitating each other's every move, and never carrying book packs with them; it is not cool." It does not help, as we saw in the school ethnographies, that the more acculturated peers mercilessly teased newcomer students for any social transgressions.

Dress codes are just the tip of the iceberg of acculturation. As children from the old country come into contact with those from the new, they begin to internalize new behaviors, manners, and attitudes, including negative attitudes toward school and school authorities. Those who worry that the new immigrants are not acculturating should not worry. As in previous generations, immigrant origin youth today do Americanize over time. In the case of attitudes toward school, however, this may be a case of "be careful what you wish for."

How Teachers See Immigrant Parents

While teachers tended to be quite positive about immigrant students, they did not think much of immigrant parents. They tended to see them as uninterested in their children's academic welfare and reported that immigrant parents were often absent and uninvolved, without taking into consideration their difficult work schedules and language barriers. Judgments about immigrant parents were often harsh:

> Part of our problem is that parents don't support their children . . . Even just to come to school to check and make sure, you know, if they get a poor report card, that they show up, or come even. We have open houses for report cards. We have 1,200 students, and if we have 100 parents, we think it is a good year. So that's what I mean, there isn't that interest there.

Another said: "Education may not be the number one priority in their country but it is here. Sometimes, I get the sense that it is not important to them."

Teachers frequently complained about the low expectations they thought immigrant parents had for their children. With disdain, one confided:

> [The best way for parents to support their children] is for them to be a model. You want your children to be educated, you have to educate yourself, so your kids can do the same. The best way is to learn English. Many parents never try to learn the language. In this community, many of the Mexican immigrants are not educated when they come to the United States. For them coming to the U.S. is the goal. Once they get here, it is "mission accomplished" for them. That was their dream to come to the United States but once they get here there are no more dreams. They go from paycheck to paycheck. They do not understand that you have to have goals in order to go places in America.

There is a resounding irony in these views. Children, most would agree, internalize their values—including those about education—largely from their parents. How, then, can we reconcile that recently arrived immigrant students "value education" but their parents do not? These misconceptions seem to be born from a lack of meaningful contact and cultural misunderstanding. The optimism and drive that teachers see in the eyes of their immigrant students is most often the result of enormous parental sacrifices and dreams.

The Importance of Teacher Expectations

Fieldwork places the participant observer into contact with individuals at all levels of the educational hierarchy—from students, parents, and teachers, to janitors, principals, and district superintendents. In one meeting with a superintendent serving a highly diverse district with a large proportion of immigrant-origin students, we asked, "What is the hardest thing about your job?" Without hesitation he responded: "To get the teachers to believe these children can learn." On another occasion, we walked into a conversation in the teacher's lounge in one of the middle schools where the students were predominantly Dominican and Puerto Rican. A teacher was asking her colleagues: "What do they expect me to do with these kids? Within the next few years, most of the girls will be pregnant and the boys are going to be in jail." This comment, met by knowing looks and nodding heads from the three colleagues she was speaking with, was made by a teacher working with fifth graders—ten- and eleven-year-olds.

Rhona Weinstein has beautifully demonstrated how teacher expectancies shape the educational experience and outcomes of their students.[35] She shows that these interactions tend to be manifested in repeated interpersonal exchanges between students and their teachers and other adults in the school—exchanges that corrode self-confidence for those students held

in low esteem. Further, these dynamics "are always driven and reinforced by institutional arrangements."[36] She argues that classrooms and schools typically sort students into those who are thought to be talented versus those who are thought to be less so. These expectations are made based on impressions of individual student traits as well as stereotyped beliefs about their backgrounds (for example, "Asian students are smart" or "Latino students are not as bright"). Students who have extensive vocabularies, easily express themselves in the language of instruction, stay focused, work fast, grasp new concepts quickly, and turn in carefully completed homework are viewed as more capable. Students are well aware of the perceptions that teachers have of them. Well-regarded students receive ample positive social mirroring (or reflections and feedback) about their capacity to learn and thus are more likely to redouble their efforts.[37] Students who are found wanting on any combination of these characteristics, however, tend to either become invisible in the classroom or are actively disparaged. Under these circumstances, only the most resilient of students will remain engaged.

We are sometimes asked to reflect on what we want for our students (or indeed our own children). Not surprisingly, as intellectuals, we are biased toward a love of learning, but as realists, too, we also recognize that in order to thrive in the new global economy we all need to be lifelong learners. The optimal educational system, then, should build on children's natural early curiosity. Classrooms and schools that foster cognitive engagement—that is, students who are engaged, curious, and eager to learn—is the standard we have come to look for. But in the schools where we encountered our student study participants, most of the teachers did not seem to have this goal. Only in one case—among the seventy-five teachers we formally interviewed—did a teacher characterize a good student as we would: "Someone who is interested and engages with what is going on . . . and [is] willing to push [herself] to the next level . . . Kids who are curious." Rather, when we asked teachers to define a good student, we found that intellectual curiosity was almost never mentioned. Instead, most teachers' definitions emphasized compliance:

> Attentive in class. Does homework. Asks questions when they need help. Is polite.
>
> One who follows rules, is punctual, does homework.
>
> My ideal student is just someone who comes to class, is attentive, works hard, tries to do the work, comes prepared with their homework every day.
>
> Do you have your pencil and paper, your books, and dictionary? Did you do your homework?
>
> A good student is someone who comes to class prepared.
>
> Has materials ready to work. Never asks for a pass. Sits in a different way in class than someone who has mentally checked out. Has good attendance. On task all the time. I don't separate behavior from academics.

In fact, we found that whether or not students did homework was a primary marker of how teachers graded them. Amazingly, the strongest correlation between any of our measures and grades was the teacher's report that they regularly completed their homework.[38] Thus, students who did their homework received much better grades than those who did not. Completing homework, however, had little to do with performing well on standardized achievement tests.[39] Hence teachers appeared to be overly reliant on homework as an indicator of whether or not a child was a good student. Moreover, as we noted in Chapter 2, emphasis on homework places immigrant youth at a disadvantage when compared to their middle-class peers; immigrant students are able to draw on far less homework support from their parents and friends than are their more middle-class peers. Hence an overemphasis on homework perpetuates inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

As we demonstrated in Chapter 1, immigrant boys, like boys from other groups, do considerably less well academically than their female peers.[40] Teacher frustrations with boys' behaviors and the related expectations about them, we have come to believe, have much to do with this discrepancy in academic outcomes.[41] During our study, we learned that teachers report that boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate poor or very poor attention in class, whereas girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate good or very good attention.[42] Teachers also reported that boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate poor or very poor motivation and effort, whereas girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate good or very good motivation and effort. Similar patterns were reported for behaviors such as

compliance with teacher requests: 13 percent of boys were perceived by the teachers to demonstrate very poor or poor behaviors compared to 9 percent of girls, whereas 61 percent of boys compared to 77 percent of girls were rated as demonstrating good or very good behaviors. Teachers also reported that girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate very good attendance, very good punctuality, and were more likely to complete homework. Boys, however, were more likely to have very poor ratings for each of these dimensions of academic engagement.[43] Overall the teachers perceived the girls in a much more positive light than the boys. One teacher's response summarizes well the general outlook of many of the teachers: "Girls, in general . . . tend to be more willing to buckle down, do their work, get all of their homework in. With boys, lots of times, there is more of a tendency to get distracted, to take as a role some anti-social types of behavior."

As we have emphasized throughout these pages, relationships make a difference in the academic experience of students. Again there is a gendered pattern—boys were more likely to report that they were less engaged than girls in school-based relationships.[44] Our structured student interview data revealed that boys also tended to report more conflict with school administrators and teachers than girls. Boys were more likely than girls to report experiencing or witnessing their male friends' negative interactions with the security guard at school. Boys were also more likely than girls to perceive schools as a "prison." Fifteen-year-old Gonzalo from El Salvador told us: "[At school] I don't like them taking electronic devices [pagers, cell phones] away, it's ridiculous; [our school] is a closed campus . . . They want to put cameras; we're going to be prisoners . . . [It is] not good when security wants to catch you. They are rude and rough with the students. The security often throws you to the ground; not me, but I have seen it."

Leonaldo, a fourteen-year-old Dominican boy, in response to the question "How do teachers and administrators treat most students?" confided: "Bad. One time, a security guard threw my friend to the ground to search him because he saw my friend had a pen knife in his pants pocket. Another example is the teachers who always screaming 'go to class' and threatening you with suspending you from school. They say all these yelling at you. Everything is bad, if you talk, if you listen to music, etc." Similarly, a fourteen-year-old Chinese boy who later dropped out of high school responded to the question "What do you not like about school?": "Of course the security guards. They always stop me and ask me many things, probably because of my appearance."

The interview data also suggested that boys experienced more blatant racism at school than girls. For example, when asked about his feelings toward his school, one Dominican boy told us: "The school environment is fine. The majority of the teachers are friendly, but some never let go of their racism against Hispanics. What I like most is to share with people and to learn. What I like least is the teachers' racism, and that some teachers do not care about the students . . . When I asked a teacher to speak more slowly because I didn't understand much English, he asked me why I had come to the U.S. and told me that if I didn't understand English I should just go back to Santo Domingo."

Similarly, another boy reported: "Sometimes I don't like some of my teachers. One teacher used to call me racial slurs in a joking manner. I used to hate those comments and told him so but he continued doing so. I got picked on by a teacher so much that once I acted like I was going to hit him. I got suspended for eight days for it and he never got even reprimanded."

The immigrant boys in our study were more likely to lack connection with adults in school, and reported more hostile and racist experiences in school. The boys appear to respond to these largely negative interactions with teachers by "checking out" of the academic process.

COLLEGE ACCESS

Most of the students in this study would be the first generation in their families to apply to college. Students whose parents have never gone to college are highly disadvantaged when it comes to playing the "how to get into college" game, because their parents do not know themselves what is required beyond "good grades." Even if an immigrant parent went to a university in another country, the rules of engagement for college entry are very different in the United States.

Further, many recent immigrant students are attending schools where this kind of information is provided in only a limited way. Few of the students attending poor, segregated schools are college bound. College guidance counselors often have absurdly large numbers of students for whom they are responsible. Not surprisingly, many internalize the low expecta-

tions of the school settings in which they work and often steer students away from applying. In some cases, they even actively discourage college recruiters from pursuing minority students who are managing to do well despite the school context they are in. During a talk one of us gave at an Ivy League school, an admissions recruiter confided that this kind of thing "happened more often than I can count."

Indeed, our data showed that students were unlikely to turn to teachers, counselors, or other adults at school for advice on getting into college. Only 28 percent said that they had learned about how to prepare for and apply to college from an adult at school. Indeed, very few of the students had accurate information. We asked them to tell us step by step what it takes to go to college, but few were able to articulate the strategies that most middle-class students of college-educated parents know well: "get good grades, take honors and AP classes, do well on the SAT, do lots of extra-curricular activities, get good letters of recommendation, write strong essays." Many of the high school students recognized that good grades were important (93 percent), but very few were able to point to other requirements for entry into a good college. Only 35 percent mentioned the SAT; 16 percent recognized the importance of extracurricular activities; and just 7 percent noted either AP courses, or essays or letters of recommendation.[45]

For many of these students, community colleges or junior colleges become the default strategy for accessing college. Under the best of circumstances, these two-year colleges offer newcomer students the opportunity to overcome their lack of knowledge about how to get into more selective schools. This route also offers the opportunity to strengthen English-language and other academic skills in a setting that costs significantly less than the first two years of private college. Ideally, once these first two years of college are completed, students can transfer to a four-year college. While some do, the transfer rate to four-year colleges is surprisingly low and the drop-out rate for students who pursue this route is appallingly high, especially for students of color (including immigrant-origin students).[46]

Over the years, all too often we have encountered a number of students who undergo a particular challenge as they end high school and try to move on to college. It is estimated that there are approximately 1.8 million children under age eighteen who are undocumented, with approximately 65,000 graduating each year from U.S. high schools.[47] Many of these students—who may have spent much of their lives here, have worked hard in

school, and are eligible to enter college by virtue of their accomplishments—instead find themselves encountering a jarring reality: these undocumented students are unable to access state and federal financial assistance or benefit from in-state tuition rates; thus the vast majority are unable to continue their studies.[48] Poignantly, eighteen-year-old Joao told us:

> I was brought over to the United States . . . when I was seven years old . . . I did very well in high school and worked incredibly hard. I was on the football team, the wrestling team (captain), lacrosse team, key club member as well as treasurer of the outing club. I was enrolled in honors English, honors science, AP American history and advanced French. I had worked my entire life to accomplish all of that, but when time came for me to apply to college everything changed. I had expected to be able to receive a scholarship to attend college but found out in my junior year of high school that illegal immigrants aren't eligible for scholarships. So while all of my friends went off to school, I have been stuck in my hometown desperately trying to find a way to live the American dream.

We wondered whether working would be an impediment for academic success for some of our participants. It was possible, for example, that working too many hours could interfere with students' completing their homework, which would result in lower grades. But when we analyzed the grades of working and nonworking students, we found no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Our ethnographic data revealed that for some children work kept them motivated; taught them skills such as responsibility, timeliness, self-confidence; and kept them from being lured into counterproductive behaviors like gang life, drug use, or the underground economy. In these cases, work actually enhanced academic performance.

Other students, however, turned to work as an alternative to school because they felt so unsuccessful in school. At work, they often felt more accomplished and productive than they did in school. For such students, leaving school was not only a seemingly sensible economic strategy, but also an ego-preserving tactic. As we know, however, in the new economy dropping out of school sentences the student to significantly lower wages and limited possibilities for upward mobility.[49]

MANY immigrant families come to the United States in search of a better education for their children. Lamentably, however, all too often their children attend the worst schools America has to offer—schools where no

student is being optimally educated, and where vulnerable newcomer immigrants, who in fact need extra support, end up being "overlooked and underserved" academically.[50] These schools, as we demonstrate, are often highly segregated by race, poverty, and language. It is precisely in such school contexts that we see the American's lack of commitment to teach "other people's children."[51]

As we learned from our ethnographies, immigrant students' experiences in school are shaped by several common factors. First, the emotional tone and academic expectations of a school, set by the school's leadership, matter to students' success in school. Deeply engaged, omnipresent principals; thoughtful counselors; and demanding teachers make a powerful difference in setting a tone of respect, high expectations, and intolerance for intolerance. This is what we found in the Putnam Middle School—a culture of engagement where there prevailed high expectations for all students and a sense of collective ownership of the school.

The more toxic schools, by contrast, were deeply divided spaces characterized by tensions and barricades. At both Quentin Middle School and Reade we found no sense of school community, but rather a culture based on divisions (between the races, between immigrants and native-born, between more acculturated immigrants and newcomer immigrants, between the bilingual program and the mainstream program, between the administration and the teachers, between the teachers and the parents) that fed a sense of anomie and lack of belonging.

In these cases, immigrant students found refuge in the school's bilingual programs. But because of longstanding ambivalence about bilingualism in the United States, these programs are often far from ideal. They tend to be starved for resources and lack up-to-date materials. Further, while newly arrived immigrant students nearly universally found emotional supports and social belonging in these programs, we detected a certain Faustian bargain at work: the tradeoff for social warmth seemed all too often to be a lack of academic rigor. In many of these schools, too, this barrier was hard to break through because the programs are divided physically as well as socially. Typically students in these programs did not share classes, and there were no structures provided by the schools for healthy interactions between new arrivals and native-born students. Most often the programs had different staff and students, who exhibited distinct behaviors and attitudes in school. There was almost no sustained contact between students from the bilingual programs and the mainstream programs, which severely constrained opportunities for newly arrived students to practice their English with native speakers.

Most disturbing of all were the general violence and culture of fear that pervaded many of the schools in our study. In nearly every violence-plagued school we visited, we found the same bad-faith arrangement: the school leadership was all too often complicit in the covering up of events, as well as denials of the problem. In far too many schools, most of the day's energy was devoted to managing fear and staying safe, with little energy left to engage in learning.