Latine Youth Achievement in Milwaukee

Prepared by the BLEST Hub and Data You Can Use

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"All the beauty and joy that the Latinx youth community brings to the people at large is not reflected in the data." – Data Chat participant



Introduction

CENTER for URBAN RESEARCH, TEACHING AND OUTREACH

Milwaukee's Latine population has a long vibrant history in the city, building local infrastructure, developing faith communities, and leading advocacy around the sanctuary movement, housing, voting rights, and more.¹ Still, these communities have faced multiple headwinds, from national forces related to immigration and immigrant rights to localized disinvestment and prejudice.

In Milwaukee's current context, Latine communities offer a bright spot. The numbers of Latine students are increasing, many organizations and schools in these areas are excelling and growing, and economic opportunities are expanding. Still, some statistical measures indicate the progress is minimal compared to other Latine populations in urban metropolises across the country.²

Given this complexity, it is critical to elevate the voices of Latine youth and folks working with them. Numbers are valuable but may mask "All the beauty and joy that the Latinx youth community brings," as one participant noted. This report is rooted in centering the perspectives of Milwaukee's Latine youth and their mentors, teachers, and other adults supporting them.

As a note, "Latine" [lah-TEE-neh] is used in this report based on feedback from data chat participants. Initially we used "Latinx" but also solicited feedback from participants. They coalesced around "Latine," which also reflects broader trends recognizing "Latinx" as not resonating in Spanish and beyond academia.³ The term "Hispanic" is used when it is the label applied within the data.

About the data and data chats

Data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS), the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) tool WISEdash, and additional local and national statistics was used to provide statistical insights into Latine youth achievement in Milwaukee. For this project, Latine youth were defined as individuals from ages 6 through 24. The indicators selected relate dto population

¹ See González, S. M. (2024). *Strangers No Longer: Latino Belonging and Faith in Twentieth-Century Wisconsin*. University of Illinois Press.

² Levine, M. V. (2024). *The Hispanic Collaborative/UWMCED Index of HIspanic Well-Being in the Nation's Largest Metro Areas, 2024 Update.* The Center for Economic Development.

³ Gonzales, E. (2023, Oct 24). Why We're Saying "Latine." Chicago History Museum.

https://www.chicagohistory.org/why-were-saying-latine/

and wellness, education participation, and continuing/ post-secondary education (see Appendix). Using a model of small, focused conversations called "<u>data chats</u>", groups of about five to fifteen individuals were convened by partner organizations that regularly work with Latine youth in Milwaukee. Participants were compensated for their time and expertise.

The data chats provided an opportunity for participants to discuss how the data reflects their unique experiences and to consider possible solutions for issues that surfaced. Facilitators sought to capture participants' reflections about statistics, as well as their ideas about what achievements were not highlighted in the data and recommendations about how to further support Latine youth in Milwaukee.

In total, in the Fall 2024, 60 individuals participated in 9 data chats. Participants were all over 18 years old and represent a variety of ages and demographics, though race or age was not explicitly requested or otherwise tracked. This report highlights main themes that emerged through these data chats.

About this report

This report is a collaboration between Data You Can Use and the Center for Urban Research, Teaching, and Outreach's (CURTO) Black and Latino/a Ecosystem and Support Transition (BLEST) Hub based in Marquette University.

The themes that emerged from convening Latine data chats are reflected in this report. The slides and script are included in the appendix and were shared with partners after the conversations to use as they see fit.

Participating partners

Data You Can Use and BLEST Hub relied on community partners to connect us with opportunities to convene residents. We are grateful for the enthusiastic participation and support of our partners from the following organizations:

- Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee (HPGM)
- i.c.stars Milwaukee
- Kellogg PEAK Initiative
- Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC)
- Milwaukee City Year
- Public Allies Wisconsin
- Roberto Hernandez Center
- United Community Center
- UW-Milwaukee Joesph J. Zilber College of Public Health

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For more information about this report, contact Gabriel Velez at <u>gabriel.velez@marquette.edu</u>.

Latine Youth Achievement in Milwaukee – Themes & Quotes

Favorite Activity

By way of an introduction, participants were asked to share their favorite activity as teenagers. Their responses suggest that, despite generational differences and opportunities, young people are consistent in what they like to do – be active, socialize, and pursue hobbies and interests. Soccer, listening to music, and hanging out with friends were among the most popular activities.





Population and Wellness (See Appendix, Slides 1 through 7).

Demographic Trends

Milwaukee's Latine youth population between the ages of 15-19 years old has grown slightly in recent years, while the national rate has remained relatively consistent. Some participants pointed to more job opportunities as a possible reason for this growth.

The teenage birthrate for the same age group of Milwaukee Latine youth has

fallen over the same time and is lower than the national rate. Many participants noted changing attitudes about teen pregnancy across generations for Latine families. They specifically cited how young people are more aware of and willing to use contraception and engage in family planning.

- "The increase in the population of Latinx people is the result of more business being created. People see Milwaukee as an opportunity because [it] is less expensive even in comparison to Chicago."
- "The teenage pregnancy rates are a cultural shift about greater access to information. Previously there was a lot of shame around sex. Now people are talking about it more."
- "My mom had me when she was 19 so she told us that we shouldn't make the same mistakes. We learned from them."
- "I'm surprised that the birth rates are down, because I know a lot of young Latino moms and they have several kids. It has decreased, I could see it's because they are having to work. A lot more women who are younger have to work. They aren't even going to school as much. They are dropping out, because they have to work."

School Well-Being

Rates of poor mental health among youth were consistent across racial/ethnic groups in the data from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey. Almost two thirds of Milwaukee's Latine students indicated that they are dealing with **poor mental health**, similar to their White, Non-Hispanic peers. However, Latine students were **less likely to have an adult at their school to talk to**. On the positive side, Latine students are **less likely to experience bullying** than their peers.

Participants emphasized mental health as a primary topic of concern for Latine youth. Barriers and strengths related to changing attitudes across generations were discussed frequently, indicating that Latine youth are more aware of the need to advocate for their mental health. These sentiments highlight how they felt that culturally rooted attitudes are changing across time and with youth.

- "I was never aware as a teen of mental health problems like I know now. My younger brother and sister are more aware about resources as well as my parents such as the 16th street clinic who supports families with free therapy."
- "I was in that 40% who didn't have anybody to talk to you. I think that was for a lot of kids too, they were raised not being able to express your emotions."
- "Mental health in the Latinx community, sometimes kids do not have the support from their parents. They will never understand the pressures that we had as kids. It is up to us to get a generation of more open mindedness so we can support the next generation better."
- "Latinx youth are experiencing the same levels of poor mental health, but they are less likely to have someone to talk to about it. There is a disconnect between the resources and the families, parents don't even know how to help their kids."
- "Mental health was not a common term and now it is. It is ok to talk about it to get the gist of when someone needs some support."

Discussion Questions

- What cities or geographies should Milwaukee be compared to when it comes to the Latine youth population?
- In what ways can we build on changing attitudes across generations and what might be needed to support bridging these differences?

Education Participation (See Appendix, Slides 8 to 11)

Impacts of COVID-19

Across data chats, the COVID-19 pandemic was noted as influencing educational participation. Participants **pointed** to **drops in school attendance**, saying the pandemic led to more **homeschooling**. Others said COVID affected attendance because it was a catalyst for **youth to enter the workforce**, while also **limiting access** to education. They talked about the **pandemic as creating habits and routines** that continued even after it ended. Participants noted that Latine families often depend on young people to provide critical family supports. The students may have to miss school **to help care for siblings, help parents with accessing services, or work to bring in income** for the family.

- "My sister, she was in high school during the pandemic, she was a good student.
 When she got a job, her grades went down because she saw gratification. She is working at Amazon now and she dropped out. How do I convince her to back to school?"
- "There were parents that with access and resources that were able to supplement education access, and Latino communities didn't have those resources or were able supplement with a tutor."
- "Families with siblings, sometimes have to caretake for siblings. This happens a lot with Latinx families. Also, students need to provide translation at doctor appointments and may need to skip school."
- "Pre pandemic it was easier to connect with families. It seems like connecting with families has been a challenge after Covid. Like relationship building with families started over."
- "I think we'll be dealing with COVID effects for at least next two years in schools.
 Life is different now, priorities are different. Kids at age 13 had to step up to help their families. But that stuck. Students who left don't see purpose of going back."

Enhanced Educational Opportunity

From 2000 to 2022, there has been a consistent **increase in the number of Latine adults holding a high school degree or equivalent.** Some participants noted that there were more **pipelines and resources for young people** now, including Latine students and female students. Some also raised the **cultural values** in Latine families and communities around education as a strength. Participants cited a **rise in entrepreneurship** as young Latine folks are increasingly exploring jobs and careers outside of the typical educational trajectory.

 "There is this known stereotype in Latino families to a focus on education. It feels like the way to pay back your parents is by going to school and that is the other side."

- "We also have parents that want their kids to go make money instead of asking them to go to school. It definitely depends on the parents. Ultimately you need a GED to get a good job, what if the barbershop doesn't work out."
- "My daughter is at a private school. If she is tardy after 6 times, I get a call right away. My niece goes to a public school and she would miss 3 days per week, she had good grades, so she graduated on time because she did her work. But the philosophy of the school is very important."
- "Latinx youth are thriving. Schools are providing more to neighborhoods, like sports facilities and recreation opportunities."

Discussion Questions

- How can we harness the value of education in Latine families and communities to help support achievement and success?
- What is still left unresolved from COVID-19 and what is needed to address these concerns?
- > What might prevent students from attending school regularly?

Post High School Education and Career (See Appendix, Slides 12-18)

Post Secondary Degrees and Certification

The data indicated an **increase in Latine youth with a bachelor's degree** over the last two decades as they explored other post high school opportunities, such as **Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs**, and their participation in these programs **more than tripled in the span of five years**. The costs of higher education and other practical obstacles were reasons students chose a path in the trades. CTE programs make financial sense to the youth already impacted by COVID-19 and are looking to earn money quickly. Some participants noted while that Latine families value education, there is pressure for youth to earn and contribute to their families. Participants highlighted the **need for "pipeline" programs and supports** for Latine youth along the K-16 journey. Together with points about more supports in the previous section, overall they seemed to indicate that resources are expanding, but more is needed.

- "After a college degree you are not guaranteed a job. I think CTE is cost efficient and more accessible, such as being inside neighborhoods."
- "Going to school might not be convenient when there are bills to pay in the household, so work could be the priority compared to school."
- "I would think that the increase in CTE is the high cost of higher education. I also know from friends that are in the trades, that there is a huge need in this area due to not having enough workers and people retiring."
- "As more families are getting better pay and achieving college, and because of that parents then do not qualify for some programs so their kids opt for a technical career having to possibly pay out of pocket."
- "Trade programs are appealing because you can get paid while you're learning. Also, it's a real job. You can take pride in working with your hands."

Labor Force Participation

The percentage of Milwaukee Hispanic **youth in the labor force increased** slightly between 2019 to 2022 and remained above the national average.

Participants talked about the **need for Latine youth to enter the labor market at an early age** and often brought up needing immediate economic opportunities to **contribute to the family**. They highlighted **strong connections between Latine culture and work**, as well as the importance of **entrepreneurship** among Latine youth. Learning from the experience of elders and learning information from social media were factors driving youth towards entrepreneurship.

 "I feel like I can take a different approach. I think it is a social thing. I saw my parents making money at an early age and as a result I want to do so too. Even social media trends that exist [highlight] blue collar jobs."

- "Latinx students are choosing labor, construction, fencing, concreting, all make more money. They see making money as more valuable than what makes you happy."
- "Youth today is more entrepreneurial. The older generation didn't see that opportunity. Today's youth is definitely about growing on their own."
- "Latinx people have historically been abused in workforce, so why wouldn't you want to explore creating your own business?"
- "For some kids, the norm might be to just keep working if you don't have a support system in place at school or at home."

Discussion Questions

- > What factors are contributing to an increased participation in technical careers?
- > What other factors are contributing to Latine dropping out of high school?
- How can entrepreneurship be fostered in ways that honor Latine youth's cultural ways of knowing?

Their Experience

Participants highlighted several areas that they felt were not addressed in the data but were important to the Latine youth experience overall. These additions included the **resilience of Latine youth** and the families and communities supporting them, **diversity in the experiences and identities** they hold, and the dynamics impacting undocumented young people.

Resilience and Connections to Community

Data chat participants noted that Latine families and communities are greatly resilient, rooted in the ways their cultural values imbue young people's lives. This dynamic emerged in the ways that COVID-19 was talked about, as well as how youth navigate opportunities and draw on the stories, experiences, and values of their families and community.

Some participants noted how, in the face of obstacles in the traditional educational trajectory, Latine youth find other ways to thrive and succeed. These include being **socially and civically active**, as well as being rooted in **strong mentorship** that builds on community strength and helps young people navigate challenges.

- "More youth are involved in civic engagement, utilizing social media, knocking on doors."
- "Feeling comfortable in your own skin has really changed in the last ten years. More young people have appreciation for the culture you come from."
- "One of the reasons that Latinx community is growing and achieving in my community is much related to who is pouring into them. The mentorship and guidance have been critical to success of our community."
- "I work in mental health and I see a lot of resiliency in those families. I would want to see more data about this in the young population."
- "Community service and how that contributes to student success. For me and my peers that is what kept us on track. That is what kept us connected to the community."
- "It comes from grit not matter what our path the grit that our parents instilled in us, whether directly or looking from the outside in. I think that is something lives and is present in the success that we see in the traditional routes or in the workforce."
- "What goes unnoticed is mentorship—actual Hispanic mentorship in Milwaukee.
 Sometimes it is available, but you have to search for it pretty rigorously.
 Thankfully, I always had mentors in high school and college."

Diversity of Community

Participants highlighted the **broad diversity under the umbrella of Latine**, including different communities and engagement in different spaces. In this

sense, they described the Latine community as being **expansive and diverse**, which was unable to be captured by the data. Multiple participants noted the engagement of Milwaukee Latine **youth in cultural spaces related to arts and music.** Some participants drew attention to the **lack of data about young Latine folks with varied experiences**. They referenced, for example, the trajectories of those who opted out of school or what types of programs they were exposed to.

- "I have noticed, and am very proud, of a lot of youth are into arts and community involvement spaces. They don't need the education necessarily, but more about following their dreams."
- "All the beauty and joy that the Latinx youth community brings to the people at large is not reflected in the data (like Arts, music, etc.)."
- "Variety of experience that young people are exposed to could be an indicator.
 Do they have after school programs, are they visiting the parks, other safe spaces?"

Undocumented Youth

Some participants highlighted that undocumented and DACA Latine youth might not have their experiences reflected in the data. Because most of the data was not broken out by citizenship, the distinct experiences, strengths, and challenges for undocumented Latine youth may have gone unrepresented.

- "We are missing information on individuals that are undocumented or DACAmented. What are some things that they might need?"
- "One of the more interesting things I would want to look at is undocumented youth and their achievements. I would want to know how that situation impacts them differently. These young people do not qualify for FAFSA and are still achieving educationally but now face obstacles with employment. Is there data we can track for that?"

Discussion Questions

- How can we capture the diversity in experiences and strengths within the broad umbrella of Latine youth?
- What spaces and organizations give space and voice to the experiences that are otherwise silenced (like those of undocumented youth)?
- Are the values of Latine youth reflected in the institutions and organizations that serve them?

Resources

Participants viewed Milwaukee as a tight knit community. People and places serve as crucial resources for young people, while spaces that offer the ability to **socialize with peers and connect with professional and academic opportunities** were highlighted as particularly valuable. **Community centers** were spaces where young people congregate and find resources. **Leadership opportunities** were of high importance for participants who highlighted non-profit organizations like Black and Latino Male Achievement as providing opportunities to develop their skills. Costs associated with accessing resources play a pivotal role in Latine youth participation. Young people find **resources that are free**, **accessible**, **and safe** the most useful. Lastly, participants viewed themselves as resources for the community. Throughout conversations, young people talked about giving back to the community with their time, knowledge, and voice.

- "Segregation means that resources are different throughout the city."
- "There are more resources for Latina women, but now Latino men don't have as much help as the women."
- "There are a lot of events that take place in Milwaukee, especially during the summer months. Positive events for youth that are free."
- "Being "smallwaukee" helps us a lot. If you are involved and you need to find something, then you can..."
- "Bruce Guadalupe school has summer programs. They have programs like Zumba for diabetics. They also have home buyer counseling."
- "Internship programs for those in high school are good opportunities because it catches kids at an inflection point in their life to figure out what they are interested in."
- "Latinx networks in MKE, one two degrees of separation."
- "We've seen more and more Latinx individuals graduating college degrees and entering spaces where they interact with you. We have people coming back to Milwaukee and supporting youth."

What Resources Are Needed

Participants point toward connect existing resources to the Latine community, where there is a lack of communication about available resources. They noted the need for more mentorship, third spaces (aside from home, school, and workplaces), and arts. Additionally, participants mentioned the value of extracurricular activities outside of schools, as well as connecting parents and guardians with mental health resources. Material concerns and quick financial relief were seen as crucial needs to address everyday issues and barriers.

 "Don't wait until students are struggling. Let them know about opportunities before high school...students should have access to Spanish speaking education. We need to broaden these programs" "I think that parents have to be given more resources. Some parents cared more about behavior rather than academics. Sometimes these parents would work multiple jobs and not be around for their kids' homework on to support them."

Discussion Questions

- > How do we further strengthen young peoples' networks?
- > What leadership skills are valuable for young people to develop?
- How do we ensure economic accessibility for young people to participate in activities?
- How do we bring about more awareness to existing resources already serving the Latine community?

Organizations specifically highlighted as resources during the Data Chats

- o <u>All-In Milwaukee</u>
- o Black and Latino Male Achievement
- o Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee
- o Bruce-Guadalupe Community School
- o <u>College Possible Milwaukee</u>
- o Educational Opportunity Program Marquette University
- o First Stage Children's Theater
- o <u>Greater Milwaukee Urban League</u>
- o Journey House
- o <u>Lead2Change</u>
- o Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT)
- o League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
- o Mitchell Street Library/Art Center
- o <u>PEAK Initiative</u>
- o PEARLS for Teen Girls
- o <u>Running Rebels</u>
- o <u>Social X MKE</u>
- o <u>Sponsor a Scholar</u>
- o <u>Sixteenth Street Clinic</u>
- o Teens Grow Greens
- o <u>United Community Center</u>
- o <u>Voces de la Frontera</u>
- o <u>Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)</u>

Next Steps and Research Recommendations

1) Highlight the Good

As we continue to understand the educational, economic, and social forces impacting the lives of Latine youth, there is a need to measure and amplify the strengths of Milwaukee's Latine youth. We call on stakeholders and youth to rethink how we measure youth voice, capture "good" data points, and reimagine the ways we talk about Milwaukee as a whole.

2) Take What is Working and Scale Up

Along with highlighting the good in our community, it is important to take what is working and reach more Latine youth. A second action step is thus to Identify and build upon the success of local organizations to inform better programming and policies that affect Latine youth. This requires both conversations across spaces and actors, as well as concrete collaboration.

3) Promote Mentorship and Representation

No matter the discipline or profession, serving as a mentor can make a difference. Milwaukee is strong in these civic, business, and educational models who can serve as representatives that Latine youth can aspire to become. Mentorship that reflects the unique strengths and struggles of Latine youth need to be prioritized to build a solid network of support.

4) Link Education and Workplace Training

Education and workplace training can be better integrated and supported to more deeply reflect the immediate and long-term needs of Milwaukee's Latine youth. By linking education and workplace training, youth can get paid to work and set themselves up for success after finishing their program.

5) Provide Supports for Parents that Bridge Generational Gaps

Equipping parents with support to help youth can be an immediate way to close intergenerational divides. To reach parents, it is important to create culturally responsive materials that are accessible and easy to share.

6) Focus and Develop Research on COVID-19, Mental Health, Student Trajectories, and Family Strengths and Values

Each of these areas strongly resonated with participants. We must build richer spaces for youth voices, needs, and potential opportunities to emerge along with better complementary data. Bringing these two together can then create frameworks to further uplift Latine youth in ways that resonate with them, their goals, their identities, their values, and their communities.

Appendix

Slide 1



Adolescentes Latinx como % de toda la población de adolescentes (15 a 19 años)

Source: American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022; TABLE ID: S0902

Slide 2



Jovenes Latinx (15 a 24 años) sobre la línea de pobreza

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population Detailed Tables: 2010,2015,2021; Table ID B17001





% de adolescentes Latinx quienes han dado la luz en los últimos 12 meses (15 a 19 años)

Source: American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022; Table ID S0902

Slide 4



Tienen un profesor(a) u otro adulto/a con quién se puede hablar

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction





Han sido víctimas de bullying en la escuela o virtual

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Slide 6

Youth Mental Health 2023 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey





Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Latinx student homelessness



• The percent of Latinx students experiencing homelessness has fluctuated over the last five years.

% de adolescentes Latinx quienes han estado sin hogar

Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov

Slide 8

Enrollment trends



Inscripción de estudiantes en Milwaukee

- The overall number of students enrolled in Milwaukee schools has decreased by 7,819, nearly a 10% decrease over the last five years.
- The number of Latinx students enrolled in Milwaukee schools during this time decreased by 1,741, nearly a 10% decrease in Latinx student enrollment.

Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov





Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov





Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov





Source: <u>The Hispanic Collaborative/UWMCED Index of Hispanic Well-Being in the Nation's Largest Metro</u> <u>Areas, 2024 Update</u>





Source: <u>The Hispanic Collaborative/UWMCED Index of Hispanic Well-Being in the Nation's Largest Metro</u> <u>Areas, 2024 Update</u>

Slide 13



Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov

Slide 14



Número de estudiantes Latinx en educación técnica

Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov

Slide 15



Tasa de asistencia por estudiantes Latinx de Milwaukee

Source: WISEdash public portal, Department of Public Instruction, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov

Slide 16



Número de empresas de dueños Latinos con empleados pagados

Latinx Entrepreneurship





There are 4.7 million Latinx businesses in the country

Latinx owned businesses contribute 800 billion dollars to the US economy annually

Source: Stanford University's 2023 State of Latino Entrepreneurship

Slide 18



Chart 12: Hispanic-owned businesses with paid employees, Milwaukee metro area

Número de empresas de dueños Latinos con empleados pagados

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs