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# LATINO MALE YOUTH IN EDUCATION





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**Advancing Access & Equity in Career Pathways, Leadership & Educational Outcomes for Latino Male Youth & Young Adults – A Systematic Review**

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## Abstract

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This systematic literature review synthesizes research on Latino men and boys in the U.S. education system to identify systemic barriers, culturally affirming strategies, and implications for policy, practice, and research. Guided by Latino/a Critical Race Theory and Community Cultural Wealth framework, the review examines how racialization, language, gender, and class shape educational pathways and engagement. We conducted a bounded search of peer-reviewed literature, identifying 82 studies and including 65 that met criteria focused on Latino males ages 14-24 across, postsecondary, and workforce-bound pathways (1990–2024). School-level segregation and underfunding, exclusion from rigorous coursework, and disproportionate discipline interact with counselor gatekeeping and low expectations to limit opportunity. Identity-based stereotypes and masculinity norms constrain help-seeking and are often misread by educators. *Familismo*, first-generation status, and limited college knowledge create both assets and pressures, while race and gender-neutral policy regimes, weak mentorship infrastructure, and exclusionary discipline reproduce inequity. Promising approaches include mentoring and role modeling, validation theory and community cultural wealth, culturally relevant/sustaining curriculum, and family-community partnerships that center student counternarratives and personal agency. Persistent gaps include the absence of a shared, asset-oriented definition of success; limited longitudinal, intersectional, and multi level research; and under examination of rural and alternative settings with insufficient youth participatory designs. We conclude with recommendations to advance culturally grounded mentorship, revise discipline and tracking, invest in early-college knowledge, and embed participatory, equity-oriented evaluation to advance equitable outcomes across contexts.

**Keywords:** Latino/e men and boys, educational access, career pathways, culturally affirming practices, identity, LatCrit, community cultural wealth, structural barriers, community engagement, mentorship.

## Introduction

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Latino men and boys face persistent disparities in educational, career, and leadership outcomes rooted in long histories of segregation, deficit framings, and policy choices that have normalized inequity in U.S. schooling (Valencia 2008; Fergus 2017; Chávez-Moreno 2023). Today, they are overrepresented in exclusionary discipline and underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs due to racialized and gendered expectations rather than individual deficits (Howard et al. 2019; Singh 2021). Amid demographic growth (Latino students now constitute more than 28% of the K-12 population) Latino males enroll in college and complete degrees at markedly lower rates than Latinas, with 40% versus 60% college enrollment and a bachelor's completion gap exceeding 15 percentage points (NCES 2023; Excelencia in Education 2024; Carey 2024). These outcomes unfold alongside contemporary debates over affirmative action, DEI, and curriculum bans, and against the backdrop of the “vanishing Latino male” narrative that scholars caution can reproduce deficit framings if not countered by asset-based perspectives (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009; Delgado Bernal 2002). Guided by Latino/a/e Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), this review examines how race, language, class, and masculinities intersect to shape access, engagement, and success from secondary school through postsecondary transition (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal 2001). Throughout this literature review, “Latino” and “Latine” are used interchangeably when referencing Latino male youth. This approach reflects an intentional effort to acknowledge and include individuals across the gender spectrum, including those who identify as gender nonbinary or queer, while maintaining alignment with terminology commonly used in existing research. In doing so, this work seeks to honor the full diversity of experiences within Latino communities. Our purpose is to synthesize evidence on systemic barriers and culturally affirming practices and to provide actionable implications for research, policy, and practice that center Latine male youth voices and leadership.

## Historical Context

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### U.S. Education History of Latine Males: Segregation, Deficit Views, and Policy

Latine males have historically navigated an educational system rooted in racial and linguistic exclusion. As early as the 19th and 20th centuries, Mexican American children were subjected to racially segregated “Mexican schools” in Texas, California, and the Southwest, often under the guise of language-based placement (Valencia 2008). These institutions were chronically underfunded and designed to assimilate students rather than educate them equitably. While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) formally outlawed racial segregation, it was the lesser-known *Mendes v. Westminster* (1947) that set a precedent for desegregating schools in California and remains central to understanding Latine educational history. Deficit perspectives have pervaded educational discourse on Latine males, particularly during the rise of standardized testing and tracking in the mid-to-late 20th century. Latine boys were frequently tracked into vocational or remedial programs and subject to disproportionate disciplinary actions (Fergus 2017; Huerta et al 2018). The accountability era of the early 2000s, catalyzed by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), intensified reliance on test-based outcomes while overlooking structural inequities affecting Latine male students, including under resourced schools, linguistic discrimination and culturally disconnected curricula (Chavez-Moreno 2023). Today, Latine male students remain overrepresented in exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) and underrepresented in gifted programs and advanced coursework (Howard et al. 2019). These disparities are not rooted in cultural or behavioral shortcomings, but in institutionalized systems of racialized and gendered expectations. Latine boys are often framed as “troublemakers” or “at risk” within educational spaces, leading to lower expectations and fewer supports (Singh 2021). These historical legacies of marginalization continue to echo into present-day educational policy and practices.



## Demographic Shifts and Persistent Opportunity Gaps

Demographic data illustrates the urgency of this moment: Latine youth are one of the fastest-growing populations in the U.S. education system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), Latino students make up more than 28% of the K-12 public school population. Yet within this growth lies a troubling trend: Latine males continue to lag behind their Latina peers and other racial/ethnic groups in key educational metrics such as high school completion, college enrollment, and degree attainment (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009; NCES 2023). Despite rising high school graduation rates overall, Latino men are significantly less likely than Latinas to enroll in and complete postsecondary education. For instance, as of Fall 2021, nearly 60% of Latinas were enrolled in college compared to just 40% of Latinos (Excelencia in Education 2024). This widening gender gap is mirrored in degree completion rates, where Latinas outpace Latinos by over 15 percentage points at the bachelor's level (Carey 2024). The opportunity gaps are compounded by intersecting factors such as income inequality, immigration status, first-generation college-enrollment status, and limited access to culturally sustaining college or university environments. Latine males are also more likely to enter the workforce directly out of high school to support their families—a reality that is both a reflection of cultural responsibility and structural exclusion from college preparatory pathways (Howard et al. 2019; Huerta et al. 2018).

## Civil Rights Movement, Multicultural Education, and the “Vanishing Latino Male” Narrative

The mid-to-late 20th century witnessed transformative moments for civil rights and educational access; moments that laid the groundwork for multicultural education, bilingual education, and more inclusive narratives. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s-1970s fought for educational equity and cultural affirmation, calling attention to systemic neglect of Mexican American youth in schools. This era led to reforms such as bilingual education and ethnic studies programs, although these reforms have faced consistent backlash and defunding over time (Delgado Bernal 2002). In more recent decades, the emergence of multicultural education frameworks aimed to recognize students' cultural backgrounds as assets. However, implementation has often lacked depth, particularly for Latine males who remain marginalized by the persistence of gendered and racialized educational discourses (Chavez-Moreno 2023). The “vanishing Latino male” narrative emerged in the early 2000s to highlight the declining visibility of Latino men in higher education. While initially intended to raise awareness, this narrative risks perpetuating deficit-based perspectives that portray Latine males as failing rather than as navigating a structurally inequitable system (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009). Scholars have called for a shift from alarmist-framing to an asset-based, equity-driven, and intersectional approach that recognizes Latine male students as resilient, aspirational, and central to broader community success (Howard et al. 2019; Singh 2021). Simultaneously, recent debates around affirmative action, DEI programs, and curriculum bans threaten the fragile progress made in creating inclusive educational spaces. These shifts underscore the need for targeted, culturally grounded approaches that affirm the intersectional identities and experiences of Latine males—including queer, undocumented, and Afro-Latino youth—without erasing the distinct needs of Latinas and other marginalized students.

## Current State of Research

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A growing body of scholarship demonstrates how school structures and everyday practices intersect with gendered expectations to shape Latine boys' educational opportunities and postsecondary pathways, while also identifying school-based designs that expand those opportunities. Studies of high school contexts point to constrained access to rigorous coursework and college guidance where counselor capacity is stretched and college knowledge is unevenly distributed, underscoring the importance of equity-minded counseling and coherent college-going cultures that explicitly connect students to applications, financial aid, and selective pathways (Howard et al. 2019; Carey 2024; Villavicencio 2021). At the same time, research cautions that punitive discipline regimes and heightened surveillance—often associated with zero-tolerance logics and school resource officers—can interrupt learning, escalate exclusion, and reproduce carceral spillovers; investigators call instead for restorative, relational, and humanizing approaches to safety and belonging that align with educational aims (Noguera 2003; Weisburd 2019; Rios 2011). Within these environments, college-access work highlights the pivotal role of institutional agents: Counselors and teachers may act as gatekeepers who restrict or misdirect information about advanced coursework and admissions, or as validating brokers who recognize students' aspirations and scaffold navigation of postsecondary systems (Arámbula Turner 2020; Huerta et al. 2018; Rendón 1994).



Concurrently, scholars document how prevailing narratives about boys and men can depress expectations and help-seeking, while more culturally grounded framings offer constructive possibilities. Asset-oriented inquiries counter deficit depictions by elevating students' definitions of success and their civic, familial, and academic commitments, and by showing how culturally sustaining practices (including attention to community-oriented masculinities such as *caballerismo*) can support well-being and learning in secondary and postsecondary settings (Sáenz & Ponjuán 2009; Estrada & Jimenez 2018; Solórzano & Yosso 2001). An intersectional lens remains essential to capture how race, gender, language, sexuality, and documentation status co-produce risk and resilience; without it, interventions risk obscuring the experiences of Afro-Latino, Indigenous, queer, and nonbinary students and missing opportunities for targeted support (Crenshaw 2014; Singh 2021; Yosso 2005). Finally, families and communities are consistently identified as sources of cultural wealth—through *consejos*, *familismo*, and intergenerational narratives that fuel aspirations—while studies also point to the need to build institutional bridges that translate these assets into navigational and social capital for college and leadership development (e.g., mentoring, representative organizations, and culturally relevant programming) (Carey 2016; Becerra 2012; Garcia et al. 2017). Guided by this evidence, the review that follows synthesizes four persistent domains—school-level barriers, identity formation and stereotypes, family and socioeconomic contexts, and structural and policy factors—to illuminate systemic levers that can expand opportunity for Latine boys and young men.

### School-Level Barriers

Latine male students are disproportionately affected by the legacy of racialized schooling in the U.S., which includes patterns of school segregation, chronic underfunding, and punitive discipline practices. Research consistently shows that Latine youth are more likely to attend underresourced schools with fewer experienced teachers, limited access to advanced coursework, and higher student-to-counselor ratios (Howard et al. 2019; Carey 2024). These conditions result in restricted higher academic opportunities and limited exposure to college-preparatory resources. Discipline practices further compound these disparities. Latine boys, particularly those viewed as defiant or “unmotivated,” are subject to disproportionate rates of suspension, expulsion, and

referrals to law enforcement, which are often fueled by implicit biases and the presence of school resource officers (Howard et al. 2019; Singh 2021). These practices contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and disrupt critical periods of academic and social development. Gatekeeping by school counselors and educators also plays a critical role. Latine boys are often excluded from honors or gifted programs and are discouraged from pursuing college-preparatory tracks (Huerta et al. 2018). This exclusion is frequently based not on academic ability, but on assumptions about student motivation, behavior, or family background, reflecting a system where opportunity is filtered through biased perceptions rather than equitable criteria (Chavez-Moreno 2023).

## Identity Formation and Stereotypes

The identities of Latine boys are frequently interpreted through deficit-based lenses. Popular narratives often portray them as disengaged, hypermasculine, or academically indifferent, reinforcing stereotypes that erode teacher expectations and diminish support structures (Howard et al. 2019; Solorzano & Yosso 2001). This “boy code,” which is a cultural script that promotes stoicism, dominance, and emotional detachment, can become internalized, limiting boys’ willingness to seek help or engage with educators (Saenz et al. 2018; Singh 2021). Internalized masculinity norms compound these challenges. Many Latine males are raised with the cultural value of *machismo*, which, when misunderstood, is reduced to emotional stoicism, dominance, and toughness. *Machismo* has historically included values like protection, responsibility, and honor. School and social environments often twist it into a narrative that discourages vulnerability or academic engagement (Saenz et al. 2018; Singh 2021). This dynamic plays out most acutely in student-teacher interactions. Teachers may interpret a student’s silence or stoicism as apathy or resistance, rather than a product of complex cultural expectations around masculinity. As a result, Latino boys may be misdiagnosed with behavioral issues or left unsupported in moments of academic or emotional need (Carey 2024). Low expectations from educators and counselors further entrench these identity-based barriers. Teachers may inadvertently communicate limited academic potential for Latine boys through subtle forms of bias, such as offering less rigorous material or avoiding offering leadership opportunities to students perceived as “at risk” (Carey 2024). This overpolicing of Latine male identity manifests not only in discipline data but also in lost access to mentorship, culturally affirming pedagogy, and inclusive learning environments (Chavez-Moreno 2023). One of the most persistent issues in educational equity efforts is the absence of intersectional analysis. Latino boys are often analyzed in race-based or gender-based frameworks, but not both. For instance, gender equity initiatives (particularly STEM) may focus primarily on girls and women, while racial equity work often centers on generalized categories like “Latino

students,” which obscure gender patterns (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009). This oversight leads to interventions that fail to capture the lived experiences of Latine male students, especially those who are also queer, undocumented, bilingual, or from low-income households. An intersectional framework recognizes that Latine males do not share a monolithic identity; Afro-Latino, Indigenous, queer, and nonbinary individuals experience compounded forms of erasure and discrimination. Programs and policies that do not address these intersecting identities risk reinforcing the very hierarchies they aim to dismantle (Creenshaw 1992; Singh 2021).

## Family and Socioeconomic Contexts

Family dynamics and socioeconomic realities play dual roles, as sources of resilience and as contributors to educational barriers. Latine male youth often embody *familismo*, a cultural value prioritizing family loyalty and responsibility. While this promotes strong familial bonds, it can also result in tensions between educational pursuits and immediate family needs, such as contributing financially or translating for parents (Yosso 2005; Huerta et al. 2018). Limited intergenerational access to college knowledge, professional networks, and formal mentorship also inhibits students’ navigation of postsecondary options (Carer 2016; Solorzano & Yosso 2001). Many families, though deeply supportive, may be unfamiliar with college application processes or career pathways, placing the burden of planning and exploration squarely on students themselves. This is particularly true for first-generation and mixed-status families, where students must negotiate cultural identity, bilingualism, and institutional expectations in unequal education spaces (Chavez-Moreno 2023).

## Structural and Policy Factors

System-level policies and institutional design fail to address, or actively reproduce, the educational disadvantages faced by Latine male students. Despite the growing body of equity-focused literature, educational policies remain largely race- and gender-neutral, failing to account for the compounded challenges of racialization, linguistic difference, and masculinity (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009; Howard et al. 2019). Latine males continue to encounter limited access to culturally responsive mentorship and relatable faculty role models, especially in high schools and community colleges (Garcia et al. 2017; Singh 2019). When present, male mentorship programs are often short-term, underfunded, or not evaluated for cultural effectiveness. Institutions also inconsistently apply frameworks like community cultural wealth or validation theory, meaning that even equity-minded interventions may falter in scale, sustainability, or relevance (Yosso 2005; Rendon 1994). Racist policies and exclusionary discipline systems further marginalize Latine males. From zero-tolerance policies to English-only mandates, these structures reinforce marginalization of bilingual and

bicultural students, while ignoring systemic biases that shape their daily schooling experiences (Chavez-Moreno 2023; Howard et al. 2019). Without structural reform and inclusive policy design, the educational system will continue to fall short in equitably serving Latine men and boys.

## Gaps in the Literature

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This systematic review examines the persistent opportunity gaps faced by Latine men and boys across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce-bound educational pathways, despite decades of attention from educators, policymakers, and community leaders. While an expansion of initiatives, research agendas, and targeted programming has aimed to improve outcomes for men of color, Latine males remain underrepresented in higher education completion rates, overrepresented in exclusionary discipline data, and underserved by educational policy and practice (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009; Huerta et al. 2018; Howard et al. 2019). Although there is a growing body of scholarship documenting both challenges and promising practices, several overarching gaps remain: the lack of a cohesive, operational definition of “success” for Latine men and boys in education; the absence of systematic, equity-focused and longitudinal metrics to evaluate engagement and retention across the educational pipeline; insufficient integration of culturally critical and relevant pedagogical and institutional practices; and limited attention to intersectional, multilevel, and context-specific dynamics—including both underexamined settings and the absence of youth participatory approaches—that shape research and practice.

### **Defining Success for Latine Men and Boys**

The literature lacks a unified definition of educational success for Latine men and boys—one that accounts for the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, immigration status, and linguistic diversity (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Solórzano & Yosso 2001). Studies vary widely, relying on measures such as GPA, standardized test scores, graduation rates, or selective college enrollment (Blake & Langenkamp 2021; Carey 2016; Covarrubias & Stone 2015). This inconsistency not only limits comparability but also obscures differences within the Latine male population, such as those shaped by immigration status, geography, and school type. While some research promotes asset-based definitions that include leadership, community engagement, and persistence (Howard et al. 2019; Saenz et al. 2018), these have yet to be operationalized at scale in either policy or institutional assessment.

### **Absence of Systematic, Equity-Oriented, and Longitudinal Metrics**

Research on Latine men and boys seldom employs longitudinal, intersectional, or multilevel designs that track progress and examine systemic influences over time (Saenz & Ponjuan 2009; Martinez et al. 2015; Howard et al. 2019). Many studies are limited to short-term or institution-specific interventions, which, while rich in qualitative context, restrict generalizability (Carey 2024; Howard et al. 2019). This is compounded by the underexamination of rural, alternative, and continuation educational settings—contexts that may present distinctive barriers and assets (Carey 2024; Huerta et al. 2018) yet remain peripheral in most research agendas. In addition, data disaggregation that could illuminate within-group differences (e.g., by immigration status, socioeconomic background, sexual identity) is rare (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Singh 2021). Without sustained, equity-focused measures across diverse contexts, educational leaders and researchers cannot fully assess where disparities persist nor identify which approaches are most effective for specific subgroups.

### **Limited Integration of Culturally Critical and Relevant Practices**

Although frameworks such as validation theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community cultural wealth highlight practices that positively influence Latine male student success (Yosso 2005; Huerta et al. 2018; Garcia et al. 2017), many educational programs still operate on one-size-fits-all models that fail to engage with students’ lived experiences and identities (Howard et al. 2019; Singh 2021). Even targeted efforts like men of color mentoring programs and retention centers can inadvertently perpetuate deficit narratives when Latine males are primarily framed as at-risk rather than as agents of change (Singh 2021; Carey 2016). The limited integration of culturally sustaining and equity-focused practices also intersects with the lack of participatory or youth-led approaches—meaning, the very voices and experiential expertise of Latine men and boys are often excluded from the design and evaluation of programs intended to support them (Carey 2024; Howard et al. 2019). Embedding culturally relevant, co-created strategies alongside institutionalized professional development for educators could transform how institutions partner with Latine male students as co-constructors of their educational journeys.



## Limited Attention to Intersectional, Multilevel, and Context-Specific Dynamics

Although the literature increasingly recognizes that intersectionality matters, too few studies explicitly account for the intersecting roles of race, gender, class, language, and immigration in shaping Latine male educational pathways (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Saenz & Ponjuan 2009). Research tends to privilege urban, traditional school environments, leaving important contexts such as rural communities, continuation schools, and alternative programs underexplored (Carey 2024; Huerta et al. 2018). These omissions constrain our understanding of how systemic structures operate differently across local contexts and at policy, institutional, and classroom levels. Future scholarship would benefit from multilevel studies that incorporate qualitative and quantitative strands, track students longitudinally, and centralize participatory research designs in which Latine men and boys are engaged as collaborative knowledge producers—not passive subjects—in shaping the policies, practices, and programs intended to serve them. In sum, while the literature reflects growing recognition of the challenges facing Latine men and boys in education, it remains fragmented, inconsistent in conceptualization, and uneven in translating theory into practice. Key gaps: absence of a shared, asset-oriented definition of success; insufficient longitudinal, intersectional, and multilevel research; under examination of nontraditional educational contexts; inadequate integration of participatory, youth-led approaches; and limited implementation of culturally sustaining and responsive practices. Addressing these vacuums will require coherent definitions, sustained equity-oriented data collection, and institutional commitments to authentically partner with Latine men and boys as active leaders in transforming their educational trajectories.

## Theoretical Frameworks

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### Current Theoretical Contributions of Latine Men and Boys

The theoretical landscape surrounding the study of Latine men and boys in education is equally dynamic and multifaceted, reflecting the complex intersection of race, gender, culture, and socioeconomic context in shaping their educational and career trajectories. Drawing on an array of critical and asset-based frameworks, scholars have advanced a nuanced understanding of how systemic inequities and cultural strengths converge across the educational pipeline. Key theoretical contributions across the literature

include: Latino/a/e Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)<sup>1</sup>, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)<sup>2</sup>, Validation Theory<sup>3</sup>, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)<sup>4</sup>, and gendered identity frameworks such as machismo and *caballerismo*.<sup>5</sup> These frameworks offer complementary lenses for interrogating barriers, illuminating assets, and guiding transformative practices that promote equitable access, culturally affirming learning environments, and expansive career pathways for Latine males. This study expands the LatCrit framework, as well as various principles of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory, to reimagine educational access, achievement, and cultural reaffirmation for Latine men and boys. Together, these frameworks provide critical tools for both naming and disrupting the long-standing structural barriers Latine males face, while affirming and leveraging the cultural resources that sustain their educational and professional journeys.

## Latino/a/e Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

This literature review utilizes Latino/a/e Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as the central analytical framework, given its direct relevance to unpacking the unique, intersectional realities of Latine men and boys within the U.S. education system. LatCrit is a branch of Critical Race Theory, moving beyond broad discussions of race and racism to critically interrogate how race, ethnicity, gender, class, immigration status, and language collectively shape the educational experiences of Latine people (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal 2001). Unlike traditional frameworks that often view Latine perspectives through a deficit lens and homogenize their experiences, LatCrit is specifically designed to reveal and contest the structural inequities and everyday injustices that uniquely impact Latine communities, including persistent racialization, linguistic marginalization, and the enduring ascription of foreignness (Chávez-Moreno 2023).

LatCrit's relevance in this review rests on two critical pillars. First, it foregrounds the ways Latine men and boys are positioned within systems of schooling as both racialized and gendered subjects, often experiencing compounded marginalization due to dominant racial, linguistic, and gendered ideologies (Chávez-Moreno 2023). This framework brings nuance to the analysis by prompting questions about how Latine male youth encounter and navigate environments shaped by whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and capitalist interests. Second, LatCrit provides the tools necessary to critically examine deficit perspectives that frequently characterize research and policy discussions about Latine males, and instead centers experiential knowledge, narratives of resistance, and the importance of multidimensional identities (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal 2001; Delgado Bernal 2002).

Throughout this review, drawing on Chávez-Moreno's (2023) articulation of LatCrit allows for a layered understanding of how structural and ideological forces manifest in the schooling experiences of Latine men and boys. By leveraging LatCrit's attention to intersectionality and racialization, this review can analyze not only the barriers faced by Latine youth but also how they assert agency, resist oppression, and build educational aspirations in the face of systemic inequities. LatCrit thus ensures that the review is anchored in a critically conscious analysis that advances specificity about what it means to be Latino Male Youth in Education within U.S. educational spaces, ultimately contributing to more equity-driven scholarship and practice (Chávez-Moreno 2023; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit), also referred to as Latino/a/e Critical Theory, is a framework that examines how race and ethnicity intersect with factors such as gender, class, and immigration status to shape the experiences of Latinx communities in the United States. It seeks to expose and challenge systemic inequalities within legal, educational, and social institutions. Emerging in the mid-1990s from Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit developed through the work of legal scholars and activists addressing the marginalization of Latine communities. Its core aim is to analyze and dismantle oppressive structures while advancing social justice, equity, and the agency of Latine individuals (Gonzalez, Matambanadzo & Vélez Martínez 2021; Valdez 2005; Gonzalez et al. 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is an asset-based framework that centers the aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant capital students bring to schooling. In studies of Latine male youth, it is used to reframe educational access and achievement around cultural strengths rather than deficits (Yosso 2005; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Validation Theory explains how educators and institutional agents affirm students' identities, goals, and efforts through validating interactions that help them persist and navigate college systems. In research on Latine male youth, the framework is used to examine how counseling, mentoring, and faculty support can expand access and equity (Rendón 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) connects curriculum and instruction to students' identities and experiences, while Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) extends that work by maintaining students' languages, histories, and cultural practices. In studies of Latine male youth, these frameworks are used to show how affirming instruction disrupts deficit framings, strengthens belonging, and supports educational equity (Ladson-Billings 1995; Paris & Alim 2017; Sleeter 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Machismo and *caballerismo* are gender identity frameworks used to examine how Latine boys and men are socialized into masculine norms. In the literature on Latine male youth, machismo is often discussed as a culturally grounded identity that can be narrowed by schools and social contexts into stoicism, dominance, and emotional detachment; *caballerismo* emphasizes responsibility, honor, and protection. Together, they help explain how gendered expectations shape help-seeking, academic engagement, and access to affirming educational environments (Saenz et al. 2018; Singh 2021; Saenz & Ponjuán 2009; Estrada & Jimenez 2018).

## Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) has become a central and frequently utilized theoretical framework in research on Latine men and boys in education because it explicitly reframes students' experiences in asset-based terms and challenges deficit interpretations of culture and capital in schools and colleges (Yosso 2005). Originating in Yosso's work, CCW shifts the lens from what students purportedly lack to the rich, historically rooted forms of capital they possess—aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant—that are often invisible or devalued in dominant educational narratives and measures of success (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar 2017; Yosso 2005; Ladson-Billings 1995b). Across the literature on Latine men and boys, CCW is utilized both as a conceptual foundation and as an analytic scaffold to identify, validate, and mobilize the cultural assets that enable educational access, persistence, and postsecondary transitions (Kiyama 2010; Huerta et. al. 2020; Mazzula & Serrata n.d.; Martinez et al. 2004).

**Familial and aspirational capital** recur as foundational drivers of college-going identity and persistence, transmitted through *consejos*, immigrant sacrifice narratives, and *familismo* (e.g., father-son dynamics), which collectively nurture hopes for the future and a sense of obligation to family and community.

**Social and navigational capital** are frequently highlighted as students leverage peers, mentors, school counselors, and program staff to decode admissions, financial aid, transfer, and career systems. These capitals are intentionally cultivated within programs for men of color (mentoring, cohort models, professional networking), culturally relevant and sustaining school initiatives (community mentors, “family-like” cultures), and partnerships that connect families to college-knowledge resources.

**Resistant capital** helps explain how Latine men and boys can transform racialized schooling into critique, refusal, and re-engagement through critical counter-spaces and community-based sense-making. Those counter-spaces become especially powerful when educators treat students' lived experiences as legitimate knowledge, because dark funds of knowledge can work alongside this form of capital by naming the survival knowledge produced through violence, bullying, poverty, and other difficult conditions, and reframing those experiences as educationally meaningful resources rather than problems to ignore (Zipin, 2009 2025; Cabiles, 2025). For Latine men and boys, this framing highlights how resilience, relational intelligence, and community survival practices can become bridges to active participation and social change.

Ultimately, these capitals are frequently braided together in practice: validation-oriented programming translates aspirational, social, and navigational capital into persistence; transfer and leadership studies show that social and navigational capital help men renegotiate help-seeking norms and build service-oriented identities; and counseling research underscores how institutional agents can either constrain or catalyze students' capital, amplifying the need for equity-minded, asset-based infrastructures.

In this review, we conducted a comprehensive, bounded search of literature on Latine male youth, resulting in the identification of 82 peer-reviewed articles from five primary and numerous secondary academic journals that met the criteria for a systematic literature review. The initial search was guided by three core themes aligned with the scope of UnidosUS's work: addressing structural barriers to educational access and opportunity; highlighting asset-based, culturally critical, yet affirming supports; and reframing identity, masculinity and familial/community context. These themes informed the selection of relevant keywords, which guided the development of research questions and the identification of the final 65 articles included in this review. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of the four-phase methodological approach employed in this study.

# Method

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## Phase 1: Databases

We sourced multiple academic databases to identify relevant studies and articles. The primary resources included searches through the UCLA Library system and Google Scholar, which provided access to a broad array of peer-reviewed literature. To ensure the review's focus on Latine males in educational contexts, we also specifically targeted key academic journals known for publishing research in this area, such as the Review of Educational Research, Urban Education, and the Journal of Latinos and Education, among others. This multifaceted approach enabled the collection of a robust body of empirical and theoretical works that are central to the study's scope.

## Phase 2: Key Terms and Phrases

A preliminary literature search was conducted, where we identified and refined a set of key search terms and phrases to guide our literature search strategy. Emphasis was placed on capturing literature about Latine males, including both men and boys, across a range of educational contexts. Search terms included but were not limited to "Latine males," "Latine boys and men," "educational access," "career pathways," and "mentorship." These terms were iteratively expanded and combined to encompass related constructs such as culturally responsive practices, leadership development, and academic achievement. This phase ensured our subsequent database searches would be comprehensive and closely aligned with the review's focus on the experiences and outcomes of Latino male youth in education and career trajectories.

## Phase 3: Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this literature review were established following the specific scope of work guiding the project. Studies and articles were selected based on their direct relevance to Latine males between the ages of 14 and 24 within the United States, ensuring that the review focused on youth and emerging adults at critical transitional stages in education and career development. To be included, sources needed to address at least one of the following core topics: educational access; educational engagement or culturally affirming interventions to support Latine male youth. Priority was given to literature discussing or evaluating culturally affirming practices, mentorship initiatives, and other support structures, particularly those framed from an anti-deficit perspective rather than emphasizing shortcomings or failures. Additional emphasis was placed on research highlighting asset-based approaches to the Latine male youth experience, both within formal educational settings, community contexts, and in the broader sociocultural periphery. The phase ensured that the selected literature not only aligned demographically and thematically, but also contributed to an understanding of how strengths-based strategies foster positive educational and life outcomes for Latine male youth.



**Study format:** A systematic analysis was conducted of peer-reviewed empirical studies, theoretical and conceptual papers, research briefs, academic opinion pieces, and case studies, published between 1990 and 2024. This timeframe was intentionally selected to capture the evolving socio historical perspectives of Latine male youth in education, from conversations of deviancy to more equitable narratives of resiliency—highlighting significant shifts toward anti-deficit frameworks and the emergence of culturally relevant pedagogical and critical perspectives. The selected literature reflects both the structural barriers faced by Latine men and boys and the growing body of asset-based research exploring their strengths, resilience, and success in education and career pathways. Studies were included if they addressed the experiences of marginalized youth, with a focus on Latine males ages 14 to 24, even when educational or career topics were not the sole or primary focus. This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the intersecting factors that shape educational access, persistence, and positive outcomes for Latine male youth.

**Research type:** The research methodologies of the articles within this literature review take the form of various case studies as well as ethnographic interviews and observations. Most of these studies were either qualitative or mixed methods in nature; quantitative studies did not span beyond experimental and correlational research.

#### **Phase 4: Literature Selection and Analysis**

During the literature selection process, snowball sampling and purposive sampling were the primary methods used. Snowball sampling, a nonprobability approach commonly used in systematic reviews, involved identifying additional relevant sources by examining the reference lists of initially retrieved articles. In parallel, purposive sampling allowed for the deliberate selection of literature that closely matched the characteristics and experiences central to this research topic (Xiao & Watson 2017). While most sources were found through targeted searches using key terms and phrases, additional literature was obtained by following citation trails and selecting sources most relevant to the objectives of this review.

### **Intersecting Barriers Limit Opportunity**

Latine male students navigate a web of structural barriers that intersect across schooling, family life, and neighborhood conditions. In schools, they are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions, which contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and chronic absenteeism (U.S. Department of Education 2018; Noguera 2003). Simultaneously, they are often funneled away from advanced coursework through tracking policies and gatekeeping by counselors, leading to underrepresentation in honors and AP classes and overrepresentation in vocational and remedial tracks (Gándara 2018; Sáenz & Ponjuan 2009). Outside of school, many Latine males reside in communities burdened by economic hardship, environmental neglect, and underfunded infrastructure. These conditions are tied to historical housing segregation and ongoing disinvestment in communities of color. Home and neighborhood instability, including housing insecurity and neighborhood violence, exacerbate students' stress and limit academic persistence (Carey 2024; Martinez & Huerta 2020). Additionally, Latine males, especially those from immigrant or mixed-status families, may face responsibilities such as translation, caregiving, and wage-earning roles, creating conflicting pressures that impact educational engagement and outcomes (Valenzuela 1999; Nuñez 2022). When compounded, these intersecting conditions create a systemic landscape that restricts opportunities and distorts narratives about Latine male potential, making it imperative to adopt multilevel responses that move beyond school-based reform alone.

### **Culturally Affirming Practices Build Resilience**

Critical Race Theory, and more specifically LatCrit, provide lenses to examine how systems of race, language, and citizenship status shape the schooling experiences of Latine youth. These frameworks expose the normalization of deficit thinking and illuminate how educational institutions have historically marginalized Latine male students through colorblind curricula, exclusionary policies, and punitive practices (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso 2005). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy or CRP (Ladson-Billings 1995), and its extensions like Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy or CSP (Paris & Alim 2017), offer pathways for disrupting these patterns. When schools and programs implement these frameworks with fidelity, rather than treating them as checkboxes or surface-level gestures, they create learning environments where Latine male students can see their identities reflected, validated, and celebrated. This affirmation fosters academic confidence, a sense of belonging, and critical consciousness. It also counters the internalization of negative stereotypes, enabling students to reimagine their roles in academic and civic life (Howard & Navarro 2016; Martinez & Huerta 2020). Yet, implementation remains uneven. Many schools struggle to provide training or support for educators to deeply understand and apply these frameworks, leading to performative efforts that may backfire. Sustained investment in professional development, curricular redesign, and community co-leadership is necessary for these frameworks to translate into authentic student outcomes.

### **Asset-Based Programs Show Promise, Needs Scale**

Across the country, promising models have emerged that leverage the cultural wealth of Latine male students and their communities through programs like RISE (Research Integration Strategies Evaluation) for Boys and Men of Color and Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success) and other initiatives which integrate family engagement, mentoring, and culturally aligned content to promote postsecondary access, leadership development, and identity affirmation (Sáenz et al. 2018; Martinez & Huerta 2020). These models draw from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework to position students' linguistic, familial, navigational, and resistant capital as sources of strength, not barriers to overcome. Mentorship, particularly when provided by relatable, culturally competent adults and near-peer role models, emerges as a consistent predictor of positive academic and psychosocial outcomes. Programs that include family voices, bilingual supports, and localized content increase trust and relevance, especially for first-generation and immigrant-background students. However, many of these efforts continue to operate in isolated pockets, which may contribute to several ongoing challenges, including reliance on short-term funding streams, the unintentional reproduction of deficit-based perspectives of Latine male youth, and the reinforcement of the very gendered, racialized, and socioeconomic narratives these programs seek to disrupt. As a result, the broader impact of these promising practices remains limited. Without sustained institutional commitment and systemic integration across school districts, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations, many Latine male students will continue to encounter barriers that hinder their educational success. (Conlin et al., 2013; Covarrubias & Stone, 2021; Huerta et al., 2020; Singh, 2023, 2024)

## **Aspirations Persist and Support Systems Matter**

Contrary to deficit-based narratives, Latine males exhibit deep reservoirs of resilience, often driven by family responsibilities, community pride, and aspirations for upward mobility (Noguera 2003; Gándara 2018). Studies show that Latine male students aspire to graduate from college at high rates, even when academic preparation, school climate, and economic hardship pose significant hurdles (Nuñez 2022). This resilience is sustained and amplified through strong support networks. Positive relationships with mentors, caring educators, and peers provide validation, guidance, and accountability. Family is particularly vital: While some students may struggle to balance familial obligations with school, many report that parental encouragement and a desire to give back to their families serve as primary motivators (Valenzuela 1999; Saenz & Ponjuan 2009). Community programs that create culturally safe spaces for young men to process experiences, build confidence, and explore identity further bolster this resilience. Support systems must be understood as active agents of persistence and success. Institutions seeking to support Latine males must invest in building and maintaining these networks at scale.

## **Engagement Must Be Culturally Rooted**

Research consistently demonstrates that Latine male students thrive in learning environments that are affirming, inclusive, and reflective of their cultural and lived realities. When engagement strategies center on community partnerships, student-led inquiry, and critical reflection, they foster deeper motivation and academic persistence (Howard & Terry 2011; Paris & Alim 2017). Critical pedagogy, anchored in Paulo Freire's work (1968), empowers students to analyze and transform the conditions that shape their lives. When integrated into culturally relevant curricula, the framework equips Latine males with tools for leadership and systemic critique, rather than compliance. Partnerships with local organizations, colleges, and families help contextualize this learning and extend impact beyond the classroom (Carey 2024). Crucially, engagement must not be transactional or one-size-fits-all. Facilitators and educators must build trust through sustained relationships, high expectations, and space for authentic dialogue and vulnerability. This repositions education as a relational and liberatory practice, one that nurtures belonging, pride, and agency.

## **Youth Voice Disrupts Narratives**

Deficit narratives about Latine males as disengaged, dangerous, or disinterested, have dominated media, policy, and even school discourse for decades. These narratives ignore structural context and erase the strengths of a diverse and dynamic population (Sáenz & Ponjuan 2009; Martinez & Huerta 2020). Programs that elevate youth voice and leadership directly challenge this framing. When Latine males are invited to lead discussions, develop curricula, create media, or engage in community advocacy, they disrupt invisibility and reclaim authorship over their stories. Examples include student storytelling initiatives, youth advisory boards, and participatory action research—all practices shown to increase confidence, civic engagement, and educational persistence (Carey 2016; Huerta & Ríos 2023). Such initiatives also create ripple effects, transforming school climates and community narratives. They are most impactful when paired with adult allies who share power and offer structural support, not saviorism.

## **Move Beyond Symbolism to Authentic Inclusion**

Representation matters, but alone, it is not enough. Many schools have adopted equity language, multicultural programming, or imagery that reflects diversity. However, without structural change, these efforts risk becoming symbolic gestures that do little to shift outcomes or narratives (Carey 2024; Huerta 2024). Authentic engagement means hiring and retaining male-identifying faculty of color, embedding culturally sustaining pedagogy across grade levels, providing trauma-informed and restorative justice practices, and elevating student and community voice in decision-making. It also means addressing internal biases; rethinking curriculum content; and creating space for intersectional identities like Afro-Latine, queer, undocumented, disabled, and more, to be seen and supported holistically. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) play a critical role in bridging trust and advancing culturally responsive practices. However, they too must engage in reflective work to ensure they are not replicating exclusionary structures under the guise of cultural representation. Moving from diversity to justice is a continuous process that requires humility, accountability, and collaboration. Taken together, these findings illuminate the complex, intersecting conditions that shape the experiences of Latine males in education—not as a deficit to be fixed, but as a call to restructure systems that have long overlooked their potential. Interventions must move beyond isolated programs or symbolic gestures to embrace culturally grounded, community-driven, and identity-affirming strategies that uplift Latine male youth in all their diversity. The path forward requires an intentional shift, from reactive support to systemic transformation, guided by the voices, strengths, and leadership of the young men themselves.



## Practical Implications

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### Education Policy, Leadership and Equity Reform

Federal education policy plays a pivotal role in shaping access and outcomes for Latine male students, especially those who are first-generation, low-income, or from immigrant and mixed-status families. At the core of equity reform must be the preservation and expansion of federal supports that disproportionately benefit Latine males and other students of color: Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, TRIO Upward Bound and GEAR UP programs, and Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designations and funding. These initiatives are not abstract policy tools—they are lifelines. Cuts or restrictions to these federal programs would directly diminish the pipeline of opportunity of Latine male youth. Reduced access to grants, advising, and college-readiness services disproportionately harms young men who are navigating systemic barriers, including underfunded schools, economic precarity, racialized discipline, and societal expectations around masculinity.

At the leadership and systems level, state education agencies and local school districts must:

- Embed Latine male student outcomes into equity indicators, dashboards, and accountability systems.
- Disaggregate data not just by race or ethnicity but also by gender, immigration status, language background, and disability to expose intersecting inequities.
- Redirect funds toward restorative justice, postsecondary advising, and mentorship initiatives designed specifically for male students of color.
- Advocate to preserve and expand in-state tuition eligibility and public benefits for undocumented students—a population that includes thousands of Latine males whose college trajectories remain uncertain under shifting immigration enforcement.

## K-16 Practice

Culturally responsive and sustaining practices must be integrated across K-16 systems, not as one-off initiatives, but as foundational approaches to learning, belonging, and leadership development. Schools should invest in culturally affirming curricula, bilingual supports, and identity-based advisory programs that reflect students' lived experiences and affirm cultural wealth. Educators, counselors, and mentors must receive ongoing training in LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth frameworks (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso 2005) in an effort to disrupt deficit-based mindsets and build inclusive learning environments. Additionally, schools should prioritize the recruitment, retention, and development of Latine male educators, counselors, and staff who reflect the communities they serve and offer mentorship rooted in shared experience and cultural competency (Singh 2021). Effective practice also includes creating culturally safe spaces for Latine males to engage in leadership, storytelling, and critical inquiry.

## Community & Family Partnerships

Family and community are not external to student success; they are central agents of persistence, identity development, and resilience. Schools and programs must be reciprocal, long-term partnerships with trusted community-based organizations (CBOs), faith networks, and grassroots leaders to co-design culturally rooted engagement strategies. These partnerships can extend learning beyond the classroom, offer mentorship, and connect students to real-world college and career pathways grounded in Latine community strengths. Family engagement efforts should move beyond translation and logistics to include shared decision-making, culturally relevant parent workshops, and intergenerational mentorship programs. Latine male students thrive when schools actively reaffirm and integrate the linguistic, familial, and navigational capital already present in their homes and communities.

## National Movement-Building

Systemic transformation for Latine male youth requires more than localized interventions, it demands a coordinated national movement that unites education leaders, policymakers, researchers, philanthropic partners, and community organizers as active advocates for equity. To meaningfully address the structural inequities outlined in this review, these key actors must see Latine male success not as a peripheral issue, but as a central strategy to achieving racial, gender, and educational justice in the United States.

We must cultivate a board-based coalition committed to disrupting the marginalization of Latine males in education. This includes:

- **K-16 educators and school leaders** who implement culturally responsive pedagogy and equitable school practices.
- **Researchers and data experts** who elevate intersectional disaggregated data on Latine males and evaluate interventions that work.
- **CBOs and youth-serving organizations** that co-create spaces for identity development, leadership, and mentorship.
- **Philanthropic funders** who recognize the long-term impact of investing in Latine male achievement and leadership pipelines.
- **Policy advocates** who push for protective legislation and sustained federal and/or state investments (e.g., TRIO, Pell Grants, HSIs).
- **Latine male youth themselves**, whose lived experiences, storytelling, and leadership must drive the movement forward.

Together, these stakeholders must work in concert to influence policy and reshape practice by amplifying effective solutions and demanding equitable resource allocation. Collective advocacy can build momentum for federal protections (e.g., preserving in-state tuition for undocumented youth, expanded investments in HSIs, and inclusive college affordability policies). Strategic investments should support the creation of youth advisory boards, participatory action research projects, national storytelling campaigns, and leadership development pipelines for Latine males. These efforts can reframe public discourse, shift institutional mindsets, and build momentum for long-term systems change. Elevating youth voice is essential not only for individual growth but for institutional transformation and narrative justice. Ultimately, a national movement for Latine male success must be intersectional, youth-led, and systems focused—not simply aimed at “fixing” students, but directed toward reimagining the educational systems that have long failed them.

## Conclusion

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Latine male youth continue to navigate a complex and often hostile landscape shaped by racialized, gendered, and class-based systems that restrict their educational and professional opportunities. These intersecting barriers—rooted in exclusionary school practices, community disinvestment, and cultural misrecognition—contribute to persistent inequities in postsecondary access, academic attainment, leadership representation, and economic mobility. Yet, the literature affirms that these outcomes are not a reflection of students' capacities but of institutional and systemic failures to value, support, and affirm the full humanity of Latine male youth. When implemented authentically, culturally affirming frameworks—such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino/a/e Critical Theory (LatCrit), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)—offer powerful pathways to disrupt deficit narratives, foster self-belonging, and reimagine education as a liberatory space. Promising practices—such as asset-based mentoring, community-rooted leadership development, and identity-affirming curriculum—have emerged across schools, higher-education institutions, and community-based organizations. However, these efforts must be intentionally scaled, sustainably resourced, and embedded within a broader structural agenda that centers justice, intersectionality, and coalition-building. This moment calls for more than incremental change. It demands coordinated, systemic approaches that link educational policy, culturally responsive pedagogy, research, and community partnerships into a unified national movement for Latine male success. To truly transform outcomes, we must collectively commit to educational ecosystems that are not only inclusive, but also restorative, empowering, and generative for Latine male youth empowerment to shape their own postsecondary futures and the systems around them.



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