Dropout rates for Puerto Ricans in Chicago decreased from 2000 to 2010 by about 12%. In 2000, 47% of Puerto Rican men and 43% of Puerto Rican women in the city of Chicago had not graduated from high school. In 2010, 33% of Puerto Rican men and 32% of Puerto Rican women had not graduated from high school.\textsuperscript{1,2}

However, the high school dropout rate among all Puerto Ricans in Chicago (32%) was substantially higher than for non-Latino African Americans (20%) and whites (8%), but still lower than Mexicans (48%).\textsuperscript{3}

Only about 3.5% of Puerto Ricans age 25 and older had a graduate or professional degree in 2010. This rate is lower than the Chicago city average (12.9%) and 6.5 times lower than the non-Latino white level (22.5%).\textsuperscript{2}

About 52% of all schools K-12 in the PRIA ranked between 1 and 2 in 2009 on the National Great Schools Database. 1 is the lowest possible rating, whereas 10 is the highest. This means that 80% to 90% of the public schools in Illinois achieve better educational outcomes than the public schools in the heart of the Puerto Rican community.\textsuperscript{4,5}

\textsuperscript{1} 2000 DECENNIAL CENSUS \hspace{1cm} 2. 2005 - 2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (5 YEAR) \hspace{1cm} 3. 2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (1 YEAR)
\textsuperscript{2} 4. 2009 NATIONAL GREAT SCHOOLS RATING DATABASE \hspace{1cm} 5. 2011 NATIONAL GREAT SCHOOLS RATING DATABASE
Puerto Ricans, like other groups, care deeply about education as a path to success. Throughout focus groups and interviews, respondents repeatedly indicated that education remains a point of pride and struggle for community members and other stakeholders. Evidence from the US Census and American Community Survey suggests that these efforts are paying dividends in Chicago: Puerto Rican men and women in the city have improved in every educational category over the last 10 years. The graph below shows the highest level of education obtained by Puerto Ricans by sex (men on the left, women on the right) in both 2000 and 2010. Notable improvements include a 3% reduction in Puerto Ricans with no education whatsoever, a strong increase in high school graduation rates (males 6.6%, females 4.7%), and an equalizing in sexual disparity between Puerto Ricans receiving bachelor’s degrees. Males improved 2.8% to join females at 8% graduating with a B.A.1,2

**Chicago: 10 Year Comparison of Puerto Rican Highest Educational Level Achieved**, 2000 and 2010

*Highest level of education completed by Puerto Ricans over 25 years, the age by which the Census Bureau considers education completed*

**SUMMARY**

Chicago: 10 Year Percent Change in Levels of Puerto Rican Educational Attainment, 2000 to 20101,2

- Less than high school: -12.3%
- High school or equivalency: +5.7%
- Some college, no degree: +2.1%
- Associate’s or bachelor’s degree: +3.8%
- Professional or graduate degree: +0.8%
Although Puerto Rican educational attainment is improving—no group studied improved their high school drop out rate more between 2000 and 2010—there are still a number of educational brackets in which Puerto Ricans lag overall as well as in their rate of improvement. Some focus group respondents indicated that this may be due to historical problems Puerto Ricans have encountered in the city’s educational institutions related to facility with English and unequal treatment. Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans do tend to have higher educational attainment rates than Mexicans and other Latinos due to the fact that they are U.S. citizens and have fewer barriers to access education (Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995).

Despite these gains, there is still more work to do. In 2010, the high school dropout rate among Puerto Ricans (32%) was still substantially higher than for non-Latino African Americans (20%) and whites (8%), but still lower than for Mexicans (48%).

Similarly, about 25% more Puerto Ricans drop out of college than non-Latino whites (19% compared with 15%), but about 20% less than non-Latino African Americans dropping out of college (19% compared with 26%). This failure to make it to the associate or bachelor level, which will negatively affect life-long earning potential, also has a strong impact on the percentage of Puerto Ricans in Chicago reaching graduate or professional levels. In 2010, 814 Puerto Rican men and 1,319 Puerto Rican women held advanced degrees. Although this is a 22% increase from 2000 levels, these 2,133 individuals only represent 3.5% of Puerto Ricans in Chicago.

“When I was a freshman in 1970 we were 1,300—1,300 freshman entered Tuley [now Roberto Clemente] in 1970. When I graduated, 348 of us graduated. Out of 1,300, that’s a 71% drop out rate.”

(Community Focus Group)
Although Puerto Rican parents value education as a path for social mobility, the conditions of schools in the community have been subject to low evaluations by the National Great School Ratings dataset. The Great Schools Rating (GSR) is useful as a marker because it aggregates state-level standardized testing performance data available as a consequence of No Child Left Behind, giving each school a score 1 through 10 for the school’s performance in comparison to other schools in Illinois. A score of 10 puts the school in the 90th percentile for state-wide performance, whereas a score of 1 indicates 90% of schools in Illinois perform better on standardized tests. We found that in 2011, the vast majority of schools PK-12 in and around Humboldt Park ranked between 1 and 3, indicating that—in general—70% to 90% of the schools in Illinois achieve better educational outcomes. The highest ranked public school in the area is Chopin Elementary, which achieved a ranking of 8. 93% of Chopin students met or exceeded state standards in reading and mathematics in 2011.

It is certainly important to note that there is some unevenness in comparing the standardized testing results of state-wide communities dealing with different challenges, and that there are some inherent problems with standardized testing as a marker of holistic student learning. Nonetheless, these long-standing problems with school quality and educational outcomes have galvanized the Puerto Rican community over the years to create innovative programs aimed at dealing with everything from the need for bilingual education to the founding of new schools and new community-wide programming.
ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

Aware of the educational issues and challenges that Puerto Rican youth continue to face in the City’s school system, community leaders have developed a series of programs and projects. These ambitious and innovative programs aim to provide a local solution to the problems of school desertion and low high school graduation rates.

WALL-TO-WALL INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE AT ROBERTO CLEMENTE HIGH SCHOOL

As a response to about fifteen years of dismal academic performance at Roberto Clemente High School, the Puerto Rican community convened a community advisory council (CAC) to review conditions at Clemente and formulate a plan for turning this liability into an asset. Working with state and local legislators, Chicago Public Schools, and the Mayor’s Office, this Clemente CAC was instrumental in bringing a new kind of programming to the high school and the city. In Fall 2013, Clemente will become the first open-enrollment International Baccalaureate (IB) school in CPS. The rigorous IB program was developed as a way to educate the children of American diplomats abroad. According to the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, CPS IB students are 40 percent more likely to attend a four-year college and 50 percent more likely to attend a more selective college. In addition, nearly 90 percent of students attending college from IB schools complete their college programs. This reformulated Clemente as a community IB high school will be the centerpiece of the “Community as a Campus” plan.

COMMUNITY AS A CAMPUS

The vision of the Clemente Community Advisory Council is to establish the Community as a Campus in the Greater Humboldt Park area in order to harness the social capital of the community to provide a seamless academic pipeline linking pre-schools and elementary schools to a high school hub and higher education institutions. The campus will provide a range of opportunities for students, from early engagement of learners in pre-schools and full day kindergartens to programmatic options at the elementary and high school levels to include STEM, Montessori, Fine Arts and Culture, Dual Language, Culinary Arts and Dual Enrollment programs. These in-school options will be complemented by engaging, academically-sound after school and weekend programs that build on classroom learning and are aligned with State of Illinois standards. In addition, the Community as a Campus model will assist the efforts of learners through wrap-around social services provided to students and families by community-based agencies and through defined post-secondary pathways into health, teaching and technology, urban agriculture and retention services from our College and University partners.

This vision is informed by a community-driven educational agenda that aims to ensure all schools share resources, coordinate programming, collaborate with community and institutional partners and—most importantly—align curricula and school cultures so that students are able to progress seamlessly from one school to the next.

Humboldt Park youth participate in Barrio Arts, Culture and Communication Academy (BACCA) radio broadcasting programming, May 2010.

A mural of Puerto Rican Baseball Hall of Fame inductee and humanitarian, Roberto Clemente, adorns the side of Roberto Clemente High School (CPS) at Division and Western.
“The idea of looking at our assets is critical. The community is a fountain of knowledge and creation—education is not the sole province of a university or a high school but rather the community and its members. So I think if we look at our community in that way and continue to build ourselves as a community, then we can improve the well-being of our community. The outlook is really positive, really strong and so I’m really pleased to be proud of that.”

(Agenda Focus Group)

HUMBOLDT PARK VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CENTER (HPVEC) AND CAREERS IN HEALTH

A significant number of Puerto Ricans attend the HPVEC as an alternative to a 4-year university. HPVEC has created a comprehensive pathway to either transfer to a university after 2 years of basic coursework or prepare students to gain a certification in rapid-growth fields like health care. For example, Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) is a bridge prototype program that has demonstrated a number of successes. Almost all participants complete the program and get certifications as Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Certified Nursing Assistance (CNA). With a LPN or CNA a single mother could provide for her family in a stable work environment. Carreras en Salud was created through a collaborative of organizations that included National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Instituto del Progreso Latino, and Association House of Chicago. Over 1,000 people have benefitted from the bilingual nurse’s assistant program.

The Community as a Campus will serve to address both historically high rates of school desertion and declining enrollment at Roberto Clemente Community Academy and its feeder schools, while also providing meaningful educational options to local high school students that allow them to study within their community. This model will also increase student and parent engagement in a manner that validates their lived experiences and dignifies the culture of their neighborhood.

ASPIRA

Aspira is one of the most important partners in the community organized around educational success of Latinos and Puerto Rican youth. Aspira, a national education organization, was established in Chicago in 1968 in response to the high dropout rates among Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. The program helps young people create a vision for their future and achieve their academic goals. Since the founding of Aspira, over 60,000 students have been provided with services.

Community As A Campus “Drop the Bottle” Campaign, Humboldt Park Youth Transforming Community, 2012