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# The Challenges of Immigration Status for Transitions to College: An Examination of Student Motivation and Educational Decisions

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# Presentation Outline

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- Research Questions and Methodology
- Theoretical Framework
- Context: Northern Indiana
- Barriers for College Access: Negative Influences on Motivation
- Sources of Hope: Positive Influences on Motivation
- Conclusions
- Discussion of Implications and Directions for future research



# OVERVIEW OF STUDY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



# Research Questions

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- What barriers do undocumented students face on their pathways from high school to college?
- What is the relationship between immigration status and motivation to be successful in school?
- How does immigration status influence the development of college and career aspirations?
- How do undocumented students maintain their hope for the future and their motivation to be successful in school?

# Methodology

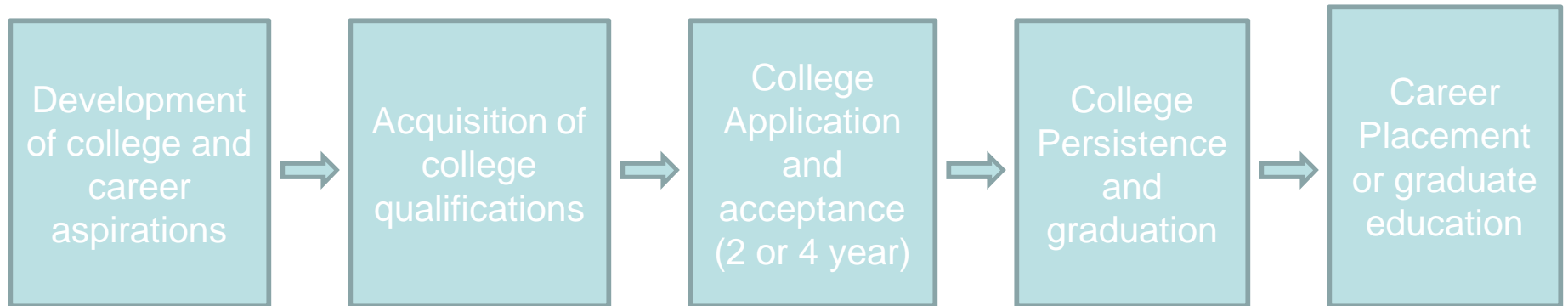
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- Part of a larger study of educational needs and assets in four cities in Northern Indiana
- Included focus groups with parents (n=24), focus groups with students (n=36) and interviews with faculty and staff (n=15)
- Process of inductive coding
- Themes of motivation and document status emerged across focus groups and interviews



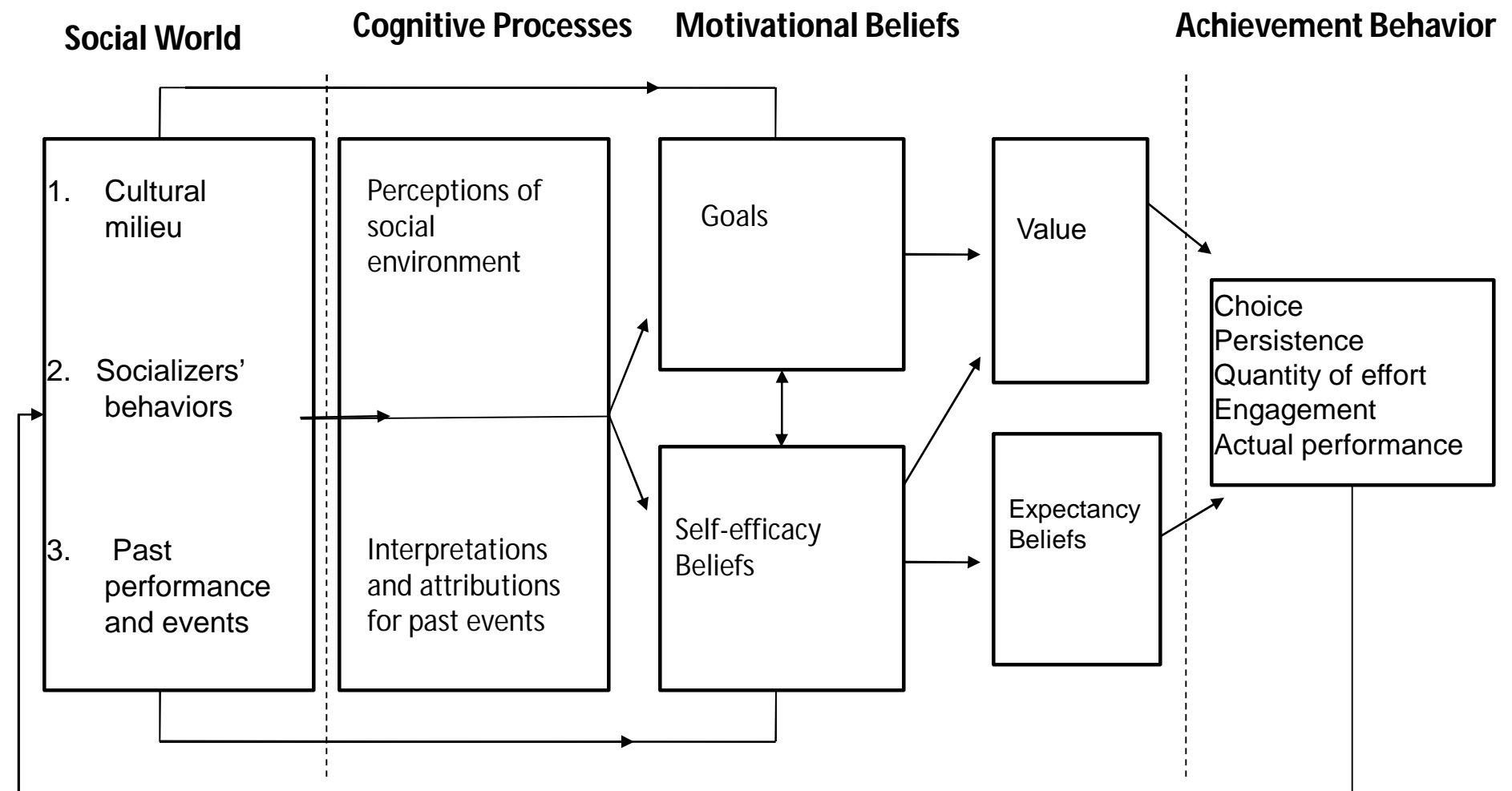
# Traditional College Pathway

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# A social cognitive expectancy-value model of achievement motivation.





## Social-cognitive expectancy-value models of achievement motivation

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- Importance of expectation that long-term goals can be reached as motivation to achieve
- Belief that students' success in school will benefit their lives in the future
- Students' goals for the future (aspirations) influence their motivation to achieve in school
- Development of aspirations influenced by own desires and goals as well as perceptions of opportunities available to achieve goals



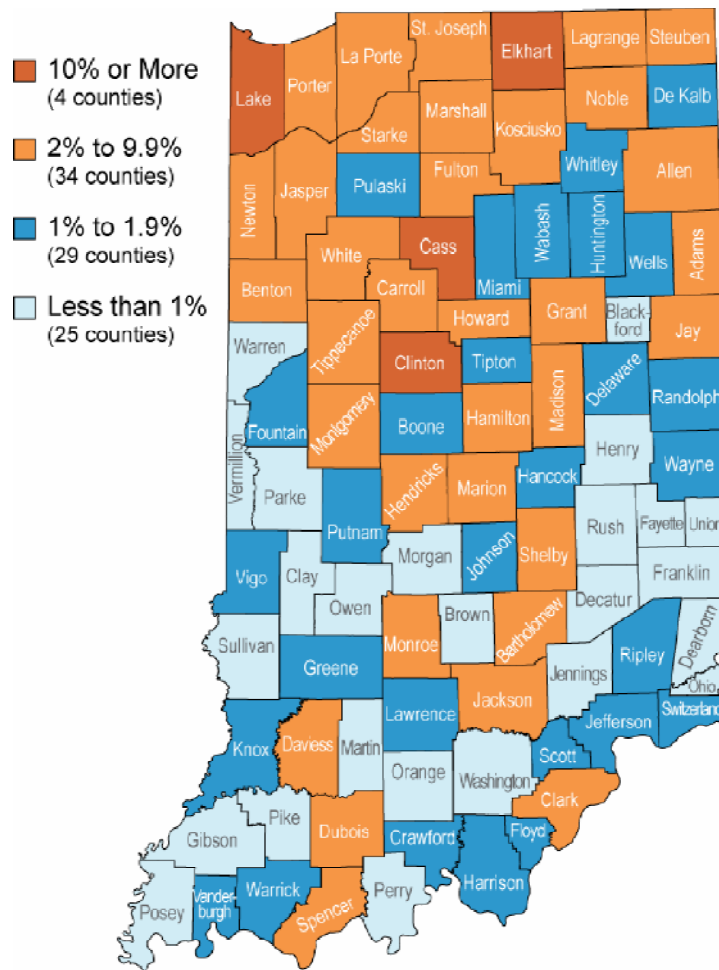
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# DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: NORTHERN INDIANA

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# Hispanic/Latino Concentrations in Indiana



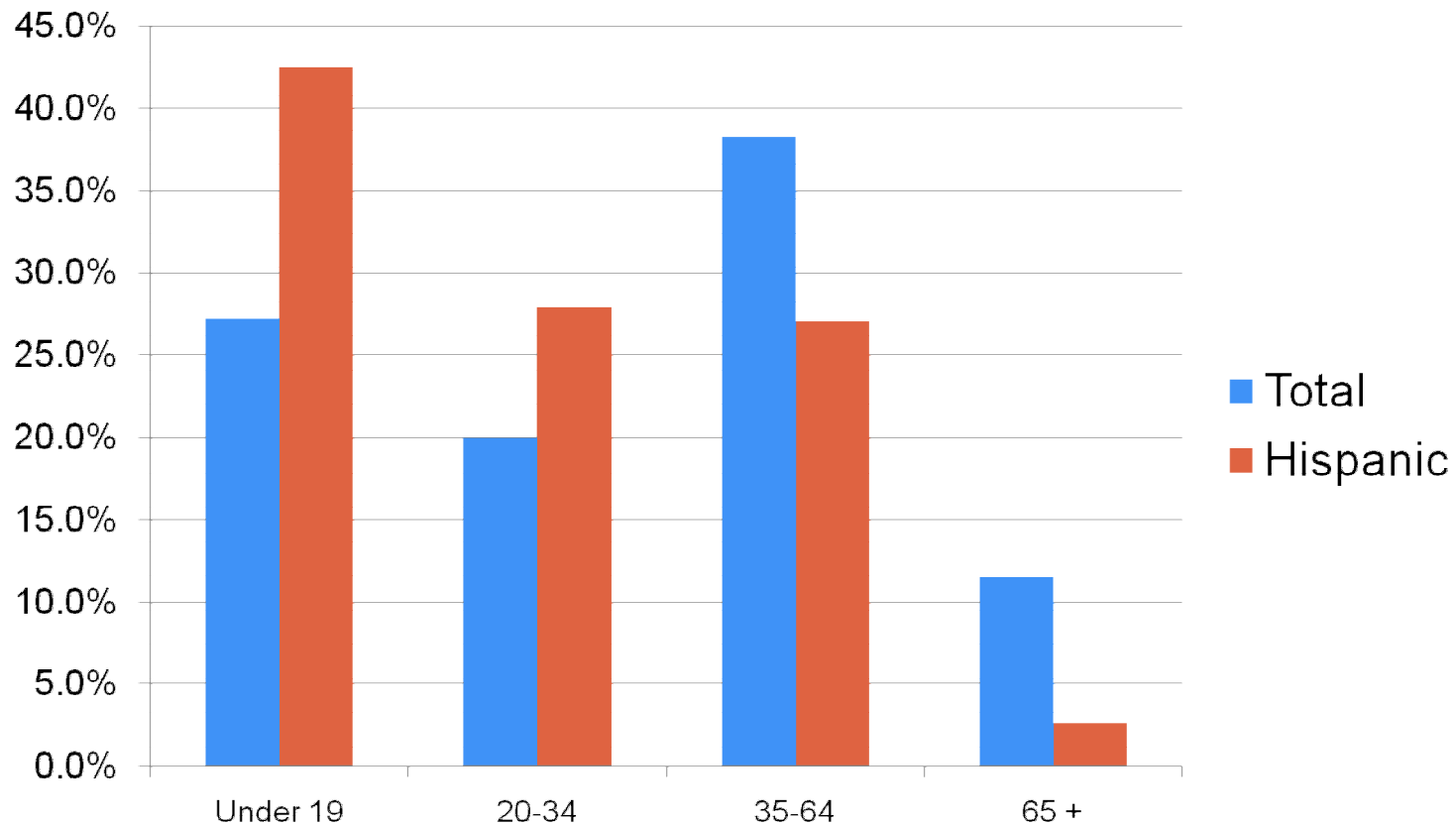
Top Counties:

1. Lake- 13.9%
2. **Elkhart- 13.4%**
3. Clinton- 12.3%
4. Cass- 10.6%
5. Noble- 9.9%
6. Marion- 6.6%



# Age Distribution, Elkhart County 2008 ACS Community Estimates

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## Economic Context : Latinos in Elkhart County

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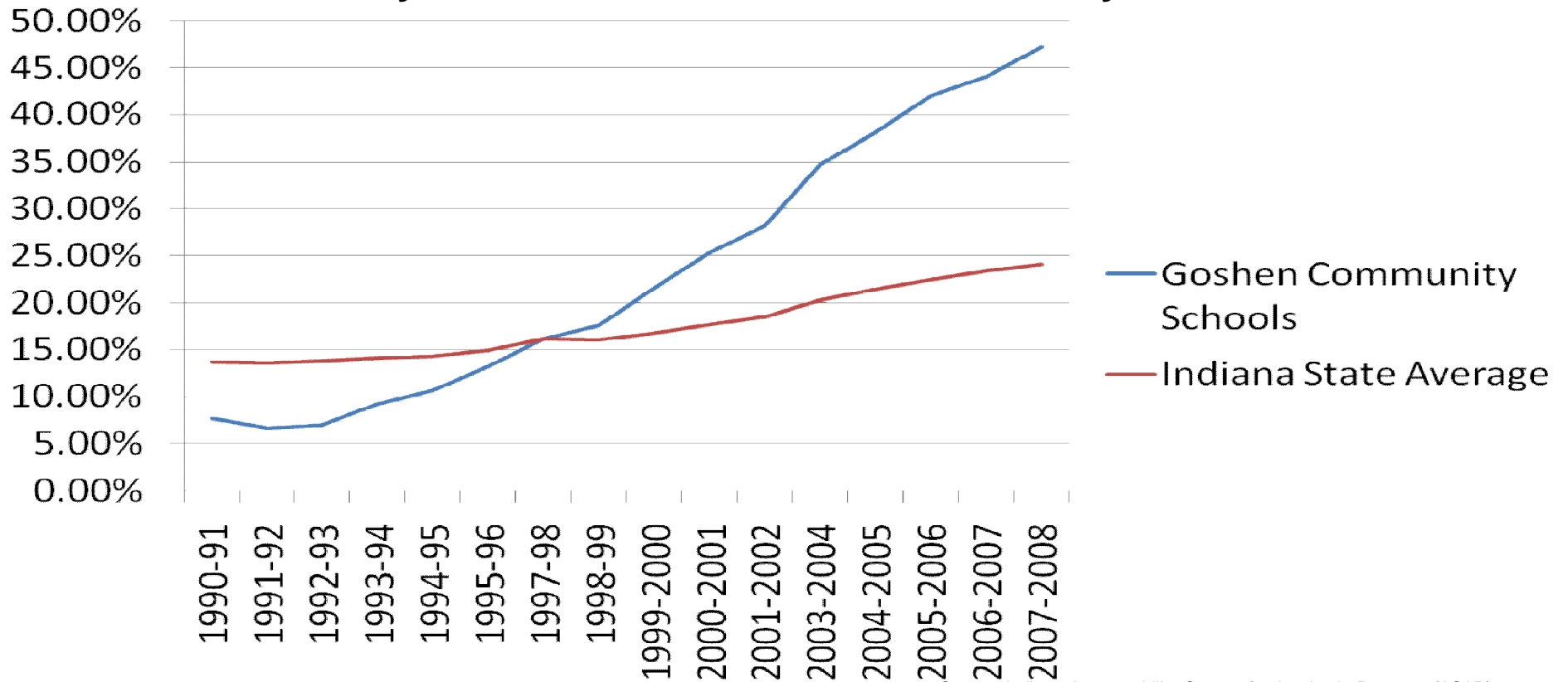
- Earn a median household income of \$37,010 compared to the total population's median income of \$47,507
- Migrate to Midwest for the purpose of attaining jobs available in the unskilled labor market, specifically food processing and light industry.
- RV manufacturing was particularly popular, but the recession has cut employment by 15% since 2004
- 54% of Latinos have less than a high school education (total population 14%)

*(Source: 2008 ACS 1-year Estimates and Indiana Department of Workforce Development)*



# School Snapshot: *Minority Student Population 1990-2008*

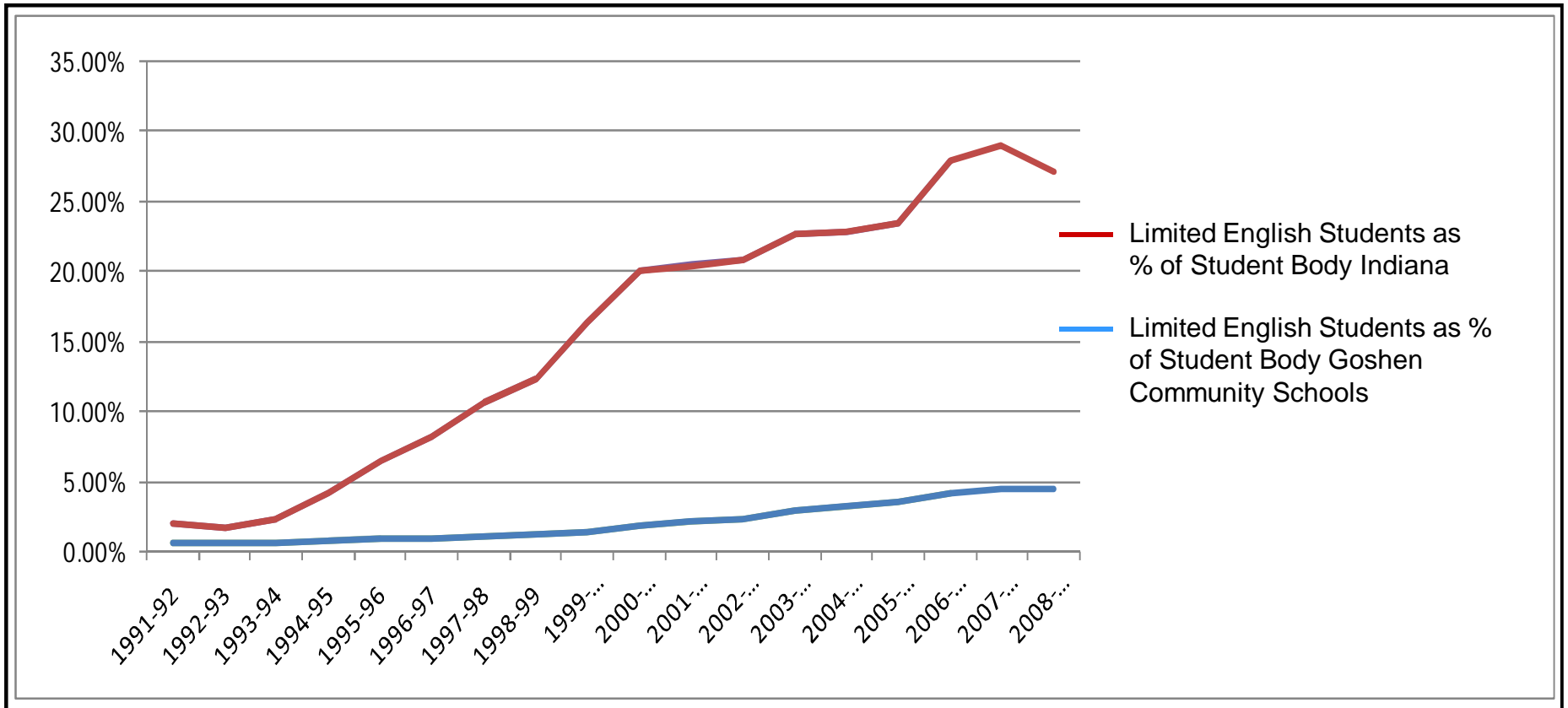
**Minority Students as % of Total Student Body**



Source: Indiana Accountability System for Academic Progress (ASAP)



# School Snapshot: *Limited English Student Population* 1991-2008



Source: Indiana Accountability System for Academic Progress (ASAP)



# Immigrant Experiences in Northern Indiana: Video Clips

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# FINDINGS: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

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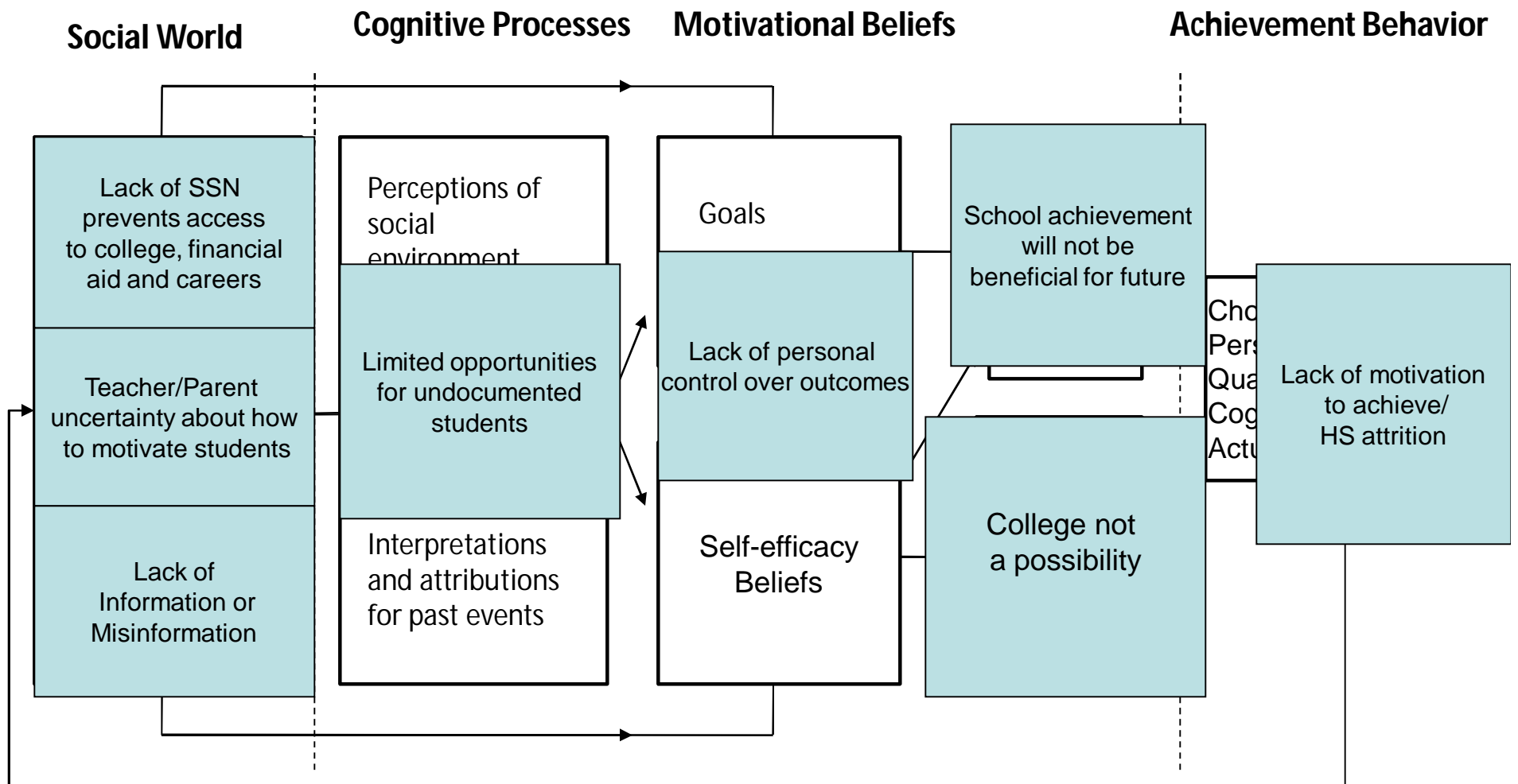
# Overview: Negative Influences on Motivation

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- Barriers to College Access:
  - College access barriers related to lack of social security number
  - Lack of Information or misinformation
  - Fear of revealing status limits families from seeking resources
  - Uncertainty about ability to work in chosen profession after completing college
- Influence of Barriers on Student Motivation:
  - Barriers influence students' beliefs in the value of schooling for their future lives
  - Barriers influence students' expectancy beliefs
  - Discrepancy between self-efficacy beliefs and expectancy beliefs caused by social environment
  - Parents and Teachers Uncertain about how to motivate students



# A social cognitive expectancy-value model of achievement motivation.





## Barriers caused by lack of social security number

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“My opinion is that sometimes it has a lot to do in that...we as parents support them to move on, they make some efforts but sometimes all that we want to do for our children, and what they want to do, and it shuts because of one thing, they weren't born here, they don't have a social security number.” (Parent)

“I have what they gave me, from the school, but I filled it out for my daughter but they rejected it because of the SSN, they told me, because I spoke with a person over the phone, and I told her that my daughter didn't have SSN, what can I do? Because her scholarship would last until June 30th, and she told me “we are going to keep it, maybe in that day she'll already have a SSN” what if she doesn't, and she said, ‘well, I'm very sorry’.” (Parent)



## Lack of Information or misinformation

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“The environment where they live forms that mentality, if they don’t have an SSN they can’t go, that’s the mentality.”(Parent)

“My main concern is how can I help her, because she has excellent grades, but her problem is her migratory status, she can’t go to any state college, only privates, and now we are thinking how can she apply to scholarships so, because the university she wants to choose is pretty expensive and she wants to be a math teacher, so my main concern is what can we do so she can go on.” (Parent)



## Fear of revealing status limits families from seeking resources

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“There are the concerns that we're officials and they may be undocumented. And that's a barrier that other groups don't have to deal with...”  
(School Staff)

“They are very skeptical because they have been hurt before. If someone in their family is not documented and you are calling, ‘are you going to call the MIGRA?’” (School Staff)



## Uncertainty about ability to work in chosen profession after completing college

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“The problem though is still, even if you can get into college, let’s say I want to be a nurse or a teacher. Well, how do I work, because everybody expects that the students is going to work part time to pay for things. So, how do you work to pay for things. Even if you manage to get through with out working, how do you get a license and then work with your license once you have reached your goal. At some point you have to get that number.”  
(School Staff)



## Barriers influence students' beliefs in the value of schooling for their future lives:

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- “If you don’t have a social security and I don’t have one so, that is why I just like should I even go? Should I waste all that money, to like to don’t get anything and that is why I hope that the dream act can happen.” (Student)
- “It’s my great dream I want to be a psychiatrist and I know it is a lot of money, a lot of time, sometimes I feel like giving up because I said I don’t have papers, how am I going to get a diploma? I’ve lost a lot of time. So sometimes I just go back to I don’t know my studying I just hope for the dream act too. We are just hoping.” (Student)
- “The problem though is still, even if you can get into college, let’s say I want to be a nurse or a teacher. Well, how do I work, because everybody expects that the students is going to work part time to pay for things. So, how do you work to pay for things. Even if you manage to get through with out working, how do you get a license and then work with your license once you have reached your goal. At some point you have to get that number.” (School Staff)



## Barriers influence students' expectancy beliefs:

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“That's a sore spot for me. I grieve over that. It makes me sad. I think one of the realities is that we have a certain population of undocumented persons who... for whom the dream, the American dream, is virtually impossible. They can excel, but if they're undocumented at the time of graduation from the university, what job are they going to be able to get?” (Teacher)

“That if they can see that they can achieve and they have a future of working here, there's more opportunity. If they see it as a dead end, to go to school here, then they're either gonna be thinking about going back to their homeland or not achieving what they can for themselves.” (Teacher)



## Discrepancy between self-efficacy beliefs and expectancy beliefs caused by social environment

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“They weren’t born here, they don’t have SSN, my daughter is doing very well at school, she is one of the best, I sent the application so she can go to College, and they sent me the application back because she wasn’t eligible because she didn’t have SSN, so she does well, and I support her in everything, but I know it’s difficult” (Parent)

“They have in their minds going to College, but they see in their future that they won’t go, their parents say that they have good grades and they can encourage them, but they have a barrier, I don’t have Social Security so I won’t go, it’s an excuse, but I can’t, and your father can say to you, “you can, come on”, there are no excuses but when they have to decide is that they don’t have SSN, even if they have the capacities...”(Parent)



## Teachers and parents unsure of how to help students maintain motivation

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“Another problem for undocumented students...some of them say, “What's a high school diploma gonna do for me?” “Can I get a job here?” “I can't go to college.” Sometimes that really depresses students and they just don't get engaged because they feel like they don't have a place and it's really hard to... it's hard to know what to do with them. Cuz you wanna say, “Yeah, you can work. You can find a way.” But it's hard and not every kid can do it. Those are things that I see day-to-day (Teacher)

“If you're undocumented and you come to this school, you graduate and then when you graduate a lot of students and I have conversations with them they say “Well what do I have to look forward to? I graduate from this school I want it documented. What is this gonna do for me?” Really I don't have an answer. 'Cuz you apply for a job, you need a social security card or some type of identification and if you're undocumented, you can't get that. (Teacher)

“I think... you have to knock doors, but it's too difficult knock a door and then another one, because your self-esteem goes down, students start thinking why did I get good grades?, we as parents need to prepare them psychologically because that affects student, he will always feel different because everybody makes them feel like that.” (Parent)



## Positive Influences on Motivation: Sources of Hope

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- “Culture of Possibility” created by families (Gándara 1995)
- Aspirational Capital: “The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso 2005 p. 77)
- Resistant Capital: “Engagement in behaviors and maintenance of attitudes that challenge the status quo.” (Yosso 2005 p. 81)

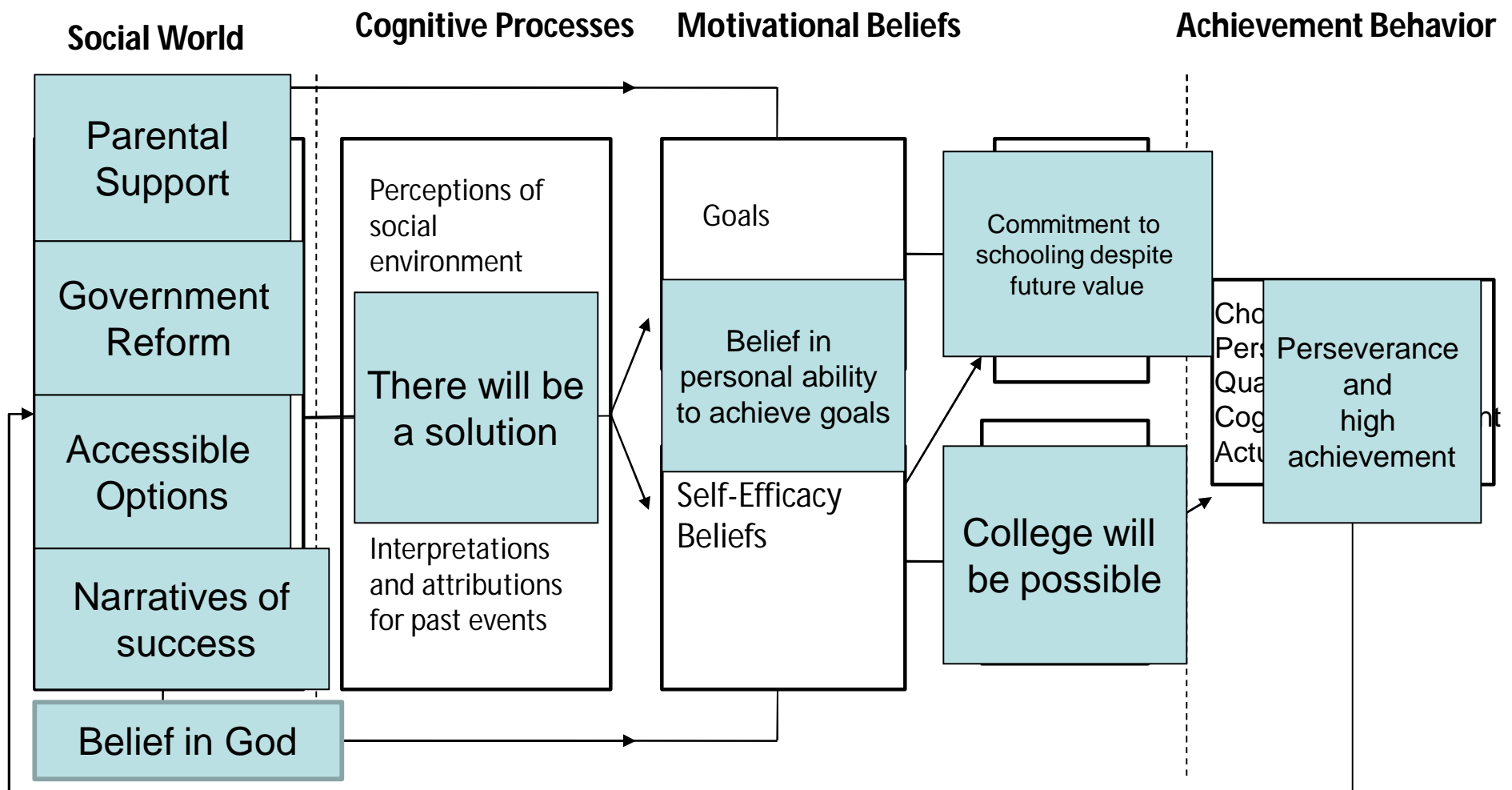


## Overview: Mediating Factors (Sources of Hope)

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- Support of Parents
- Hope in Political Change
- Accessible Options
- Narratives of Success
- Personal Commitment to Success
- Belief in God

# A social cognitive expectancy-value model of achievement motivation.





## Mediating Factors: Support of Parents

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When you don't have an SSN, it's not like a teacher or a college... it's not that you are stopping a student because of that, it's something that comes from the government, they are based in a law that comes from the government, as a parent we have to make our children study, show what he knows. The future is uncertain, we don't have a number because we weren't born with a number... The government gives you that... This is the law of this country, but this can't stop us, as a mother that doesn't stop me, an insignificant number won't stop me. (Parent)



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## Mediating Factors: Hope in political change

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“...We don’t know today, tomorrow we could have a migratory reform, but we have to see in the future if we are good citizens, respectable, a person that did something for the country that’s going to recognize you, after 3, 4, 5 years, maybe when you’re old, but they will recognize you. (Parent)

“I along with my current students, are hopeful that Obama will be able to actually have new federally totally comprehensive immigration policy.” (Teacher)

“It’s my great dream I want to be a psychiatrist and I know is a lot of money, a lot of time, sometimes I feel like giving up because I said I don’t have papers, how am I going to get a diploma? I’ve lost a lot of time. So sometimes I just go back to I don’t know my studying I just hope for the dream act too. We are just hoping.” (Student)



# Mediating Factors: Accessible Options

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“They (community college) charge the same for everybody. And they also have some scholarships for undocumented students. I had several of my boys come up to me for letters and I wrote these letters and they got this multicultural scholarship that paid half their tuition. We've worked well with them and it tends to be a little less intimidating.” (Teacher)

“I am very grateful for the fact that we have the community college that is fairly affordable and that students can at least get started going to college there, even if they can't afford to go somewhere else.” (Teacher)



## Mediating Factors: Narratives of Success

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“For me, my mom, pushes that a lot, me and my brother, since my brother entered college , he says that it is a great experience and that it will help you a lot, and he is the one who gives me hope, he tells me it doesn’t matter that I don’t have papers, “you go for it”, it doesn’t matter, look at me, look how I am, I am happy, in one more year he will graduate from here...”  
(Student)



## Mediating Factors: Personal commitment to achievement

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“Then again it is also in the student to be motivated, I found motivation in somewhere within myself to not let those struggles get to me, to want to succeed.”  
(Student)



# Mediating Factors: Belief in God

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“Let’s hope for new horizons in this government and let’s hope that God will help every family, and Holy God he is picking up the economy here, little by little, so let’s talk about positive things to young people so they can be positive.” (Parent)



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# CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

# Conclusions

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- Student's Achievement in School is influenced by their beliefs that it will be beneficial for their future lives
  - Barriers to college access and career opportunities can potentially cause students to disengage as early as middle or high school
  - Importance of mediating factors for helping them maintain hope that they can achieve their goals despite current barriers
- Teachers and Parents play an important role in helping students envision alternatives for their futures

# Implications

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## For High Schools

- Need for teachers to have better understanding of experiences of undocumented students
- Use alternative methods to motivate all students

## For Families

- Family support one of the primary sources of motivation for students

## For Higher Education

- Increase awareness of options for undocumented students through early outreach activities with middle and high school students
- Expand awareness of middle and high school teachers and counselors about possibilities that exist so they can communicate these with students

## Policy Implications

- Attention to the implications for offering equitable K-12 educational experiences for all students—includes undocumented students as well
- Importance of Dream Act as a source of motivation for K-12 students



# Directions for Future Research

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- Assessment of the ways undocumented students and families currently access information about the educational options available to them
- Further investigation of the important sources of motivation for high-achieving undocumented students
- Investigation of successful strategies of high school teachers and counselors who work with undocumented students



# Questions for Discussion

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- What other implications or directions for future research might we consider based on our study?
- How does this relate to experiences that you have had in research or program development related to documentation status?
- What are some of the challenges related to doing research related to the experiences of undocumented students? What are some strategies for overcoming these challenges?