

LATINOS IN NEW SPACES: EMERGING TRENDS & IMPLICATIONS FOR FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY

KEY FINDINGS

Latino students represent an increasing share of the U.S. student population and growth is happening in all states. Projections from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that by 2023, Hispanic students will account for nearly 30% of total enrollments, from early childhood through grade 12. Additionally, this growth is occurring across the nation. For example, the share of Latino students increased in all regions but doubled in the Midwest and South.

Latinos have made significant gains in educational attainment. In recent years, educational outcomes among Latino students have improved in several critical areas. Specifically, Latino students are now graduating at higher rates than ever, their dropout rate is the lowest in recent history, and they are enrolled in postsecondary institutions in record numbers.

Despite improvements, disparities in performance between Latinos and other students persist. Data indicate that Latino students' educational outcomes lag behind those of other students in several areas: Latinos have lower math and reading scores on national assessments, higher dropout rates, and lower postsecondary degree attainment compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

Demographic shifts and persistent disparities in education require renewed focus and effort. Policymakers and advocates continue to have a significant role to play in ensuring that education policies support students' success in the classroom and beyond. Given the trends among Latino students, policymakers must also specifically consider the evolving needs of the Latino student population to create effective policies.

Brenda Calderon, Education Policy Analyst, Education Policy Project, authored this statistical brief with substantive input from Leticia Tomas Bustillos, Associate Director, Education Policy Project, and guidance and oversight from Samantha Vargas Poppe, Assistant Director, Policy Analysis Center. This brief was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions are those of the author and NCLR alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our funders. Permission to copy, disseminate, or otherwise use information from this paper is granted, provided that appropriate credit is given to NCLR.

INTRODUCTION

The growing population of Latinos* in the United States is shaping the American landscape, including the country's educational system, in many ways. This shift can be seen in schools across the United States as the student population becomes increasingly Latino at all educational levels. Projections from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that by 2023 Hispanic students will account for nearly 30% of total enrollments, from early childhood through grade 12.¹ Growth in Latino enrollment is occurring at high rates and in new settings. Geographically, the Latino population is booming in many states, particularly across the American South. In higher education, Latinos have made significant gains and are enrolling in postsecondary institutions in record numbers. Furthermore, recent polls show that Latinos place an overwhelming value on higher education: 87% of Latino respondents said that college education was extremely important, significantly higher than the national average of 78%.²

*Despite improvements in educational attainment among Latinos, disparities in performance persist and have the potential to **affect the future** economic prospects of this nation.*

Data indicate that Latino students have lower math and reading scores on national assessments, high dropout rates, and low postsecondary degree attainment compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Addressing these disparities and getting Latino

students on the road to college and career is imperative to the country's future economic security. It is projected that by 2020 nearly 65% of all jobs will require some type of postsecondary degree.³ Moreover, by 2020 Latinos will account for nearly 20% of all American workers.⁴ As such, an educated and skilled Latino population is central to meeting projected labor market needs and maintaining a strong economy.

Additionally, improved Latino educational achievement will be necessary to meet ambitious national goals for postsecondary degree attainment. In 2012, the Organization for Education and Cultural Development (OECD) ranked the United States 12th in the world in postsecondary degree attainment among OECD countries, a drop from its top ranking in 1990.⁵ Following that ranking, President Obama created an ambitious goal to once again be the country with the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.⁶ Latino students now constitute over one-quarter of all K–12 enrollments and represent a growing share of postsecondary enrollments. In 2012, however, only 13.1% of Hispanics age 25–29 had earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 17.8% of Blacks, 31.1% of Whites, and 50.4% of Asians.⁷ Given the growing Latino population, disparities in educational outcomes must be reduced in order to reach this national goal.

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

PROFILE OF THE U.S. LATINO STUDENT POPULATION

The U.S. Latino student population is a diverse and growing group, and there are some key trends emerging within this population. In general, a significant portion of the Latino student population is under 17, the majority is U.S.-born, and they represent a growing presence in all regions of the country. Latinos compose the second-largest group of students in schools after Whites.

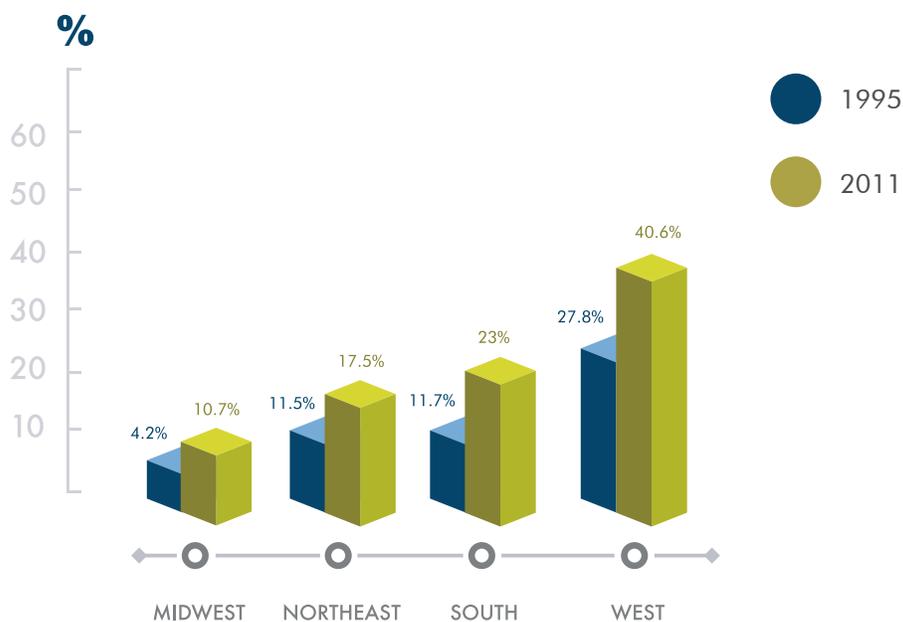
- One-third of the Hispanic population is under 17.

In 2013, 33.2% of the Hispanic population were 17 years of age or younger.¹³ That same year, over 17.2 million Hispanics were enrolled in school: 13.6 million students in prekindergarten through 12th grade at public schools and over 3.5 million Hispanic students in postsecondary education.¹⁴

- The majority of Latino youth are U.S.-born. Over 90% of Latino children in the United States are native-born citizens. About 8.3% of Latino children under 18 are noncitizens.¹⁵ The states with the largest reported number of immigrant children and youth were California (217,005), Texas (169,287), and Florida (81,995).¹⁶

- The Latino student population is growing while other student groups are decreasing. Between 2001 and 2011, the proportion of Latino students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools increased from 15.6% of all students to 22.1%. Comparatively, the proportion of White students decreased over this period from 60% to 52% and the proportion of Black students decreased slightly from 17% to 16%.¹⁷

Figure 2: SHARE OF HISPANIC K-12 ENROLLMENT BY REGION, 1995 AND 2011



Source: NCLR analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, "Digest of Education Statistics 2013." Washington, DC, 2013.

- Every region in the United States has experienced growth in the share of Latino students in schools.

The largest growth of Latino students as a share of total enrollment of all students in schools has occurred in the West. Between 1995 and 2011, the proportion of Hispanic students in the West grew from 27.8% to 40.6%. During that same period, the Hispanic student population more than doubled in the Midwest (4.2% to 10.7%), nearly doubled in the South (11.7% to 23.0%), and increased significantly in the Northeast (11.5% to 17.5%).¹⁸

See Figure 2 on the previous page for distribution of total share of Latino students by region over time.

- A significant share of Hispanic children lives in poverty.

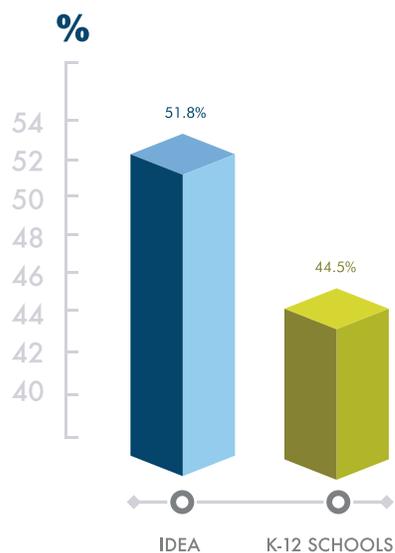
In 2012, about 33% of all Hispanic children under 18 were living in poverty.¹⁹ The high numbers of Hispanic children in poverty is concerning as research shows that lower household income correlates with lower achievement in school.²⁰

- The rate of Hispanic students enrolled in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs has outpaced their overall population growth in schools.²¹

From 2000 to 2012, Latino student participation in IDEA grew at a rate of 51.8%, while White and Black students served under IDEA decreased during the same period.²² This growth rate was significantly higher than the overall growth rate of Latino students in public schools (44.5%) during that same time frame, indicating that more students were identified as having special needs or requiring special education.²³

See Figure 3 for the growth rate of the Latino population enrolled in IDEA programs and overall K-12 education between 2000 and 2012.

Figure 3: GROWTH OF LATINO ENROLLMENT IN IDEA PROGRAMS AND K-12 EDUCATION, 2000-2012



Source: NCLR analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, "Digest of Education Statistics 2013." Washington, DC, 2013.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: ACCESSING A STRONG START FOR LATINO STUDENTS

Latino students stand to benefit greatly from existing early childhood education programs; however, data show that Latino children are less likely to be enrolled than other children. Research shows that access to early childhood education is essential in neurological and physical development.²⁴ Therefore, increasing access to early childhood education opportunities can positively affect the educational trajectories of students. For example, students who were behind in vocabulary, math, and literacy development upon entry into preschool but enrolled in preschool full-time were more likely to reach national averages.²⁵ As such, early childhood education programs are critical to ensuring that the growing population of young Hispanic children is able to build a strong educational foundation.

- Fewer Latino children are enrolled in pre-primary programs.

Latinos are the least likely racial/ethnic group to be enrolled in preschool: only 57.6% of three- to five-year-old Latino children were enrolled in school in 2012, compared to 65.8% of Blacks, 66.7% of Whites, and 68.6% of Asians.²⁶

- Latino children were more likely to attend full-day pre-primary programs.

Latino children enrolled in pre-primary programs were more likely to attend a full-day program (59.2%) when compared to White children (56.3%) and Asian children (54.6%). Black children have a much higher rate of enrollment in full-day programs (78%).

See Table 1 for percentages of children, by race/ethnicity, enrolled in pre-primary programs between 2000 and 2012.

Table 1: THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR-OLDS ENROLLED IN PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAMS BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2012

RACE	PERCENTAGE ENROLLED IN PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAMS	OF THOSE ENROLLED	
		PERCENT FULL TIME	PERCENT PART-TIME
Hispanic	57.6%	59.2%	40.8%
Black	65.8%	78.0%	22.0%
White	66.7%	56.3%	43.7%
Asian	68.6%	54.6%	45.4%

Source: NCLR analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, "Digest of Education Statistics 2013." Washington, DC, 2013.

- Latino children compose a significant share of enrollment in Head Start programs.

Thirty-seven percent of Hispanic children ages three to five were enrolled in Head Start, a program dedicated to school preparedness for low-income students.²⁷ This percentage is only slightly higher than the total amount of Latino children under five who reside in poverty (35.2%).²⁸ Hispanics also constitute 35% of all enrollments in the Early Head Start program, which provides learning opportunities for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers up to age three.²⁹ Of all Head Start participants, nearly 25% in the 2012–2013 cohort came from families that primarily spoke Spanish at home.³⁰

- The vast majority of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start enrollees are Hispanic.

Ninety-seven percent of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start participants are Hispanic. These programs provide services to students who move geographically with agricultural work.³¹

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION: IMPROVEMENTS ALONG THE EDUCATION PIPELINE

While gains have been made in certain areas, the overall academic performance of Latino students has not yet reached parity with their non-Latino peers. The U.S. Department of Education predicts that by 2023 Latino students will constitute nearly one-third of all K–12 enrollments, up from 13.5% in 1995.³² Latino students are now graduating at higher rates than ever, and their dropout rate is the lowest in a decade. However, Latino students need to improve in both reading and math national assessments.

Only 26% of Latino students scored proficient in fourth-grade math compared to 54% of Whites. In reading, only 20% of Hispanic fourth-graders scored proficient while 46% of Whites reached those targets.³³

*These indicators suggest that while Latino student achievement shows progress, more needs to be done to **address disparities** among peer groups.*

- The majority of Hispanic students are enrolled in primary education.

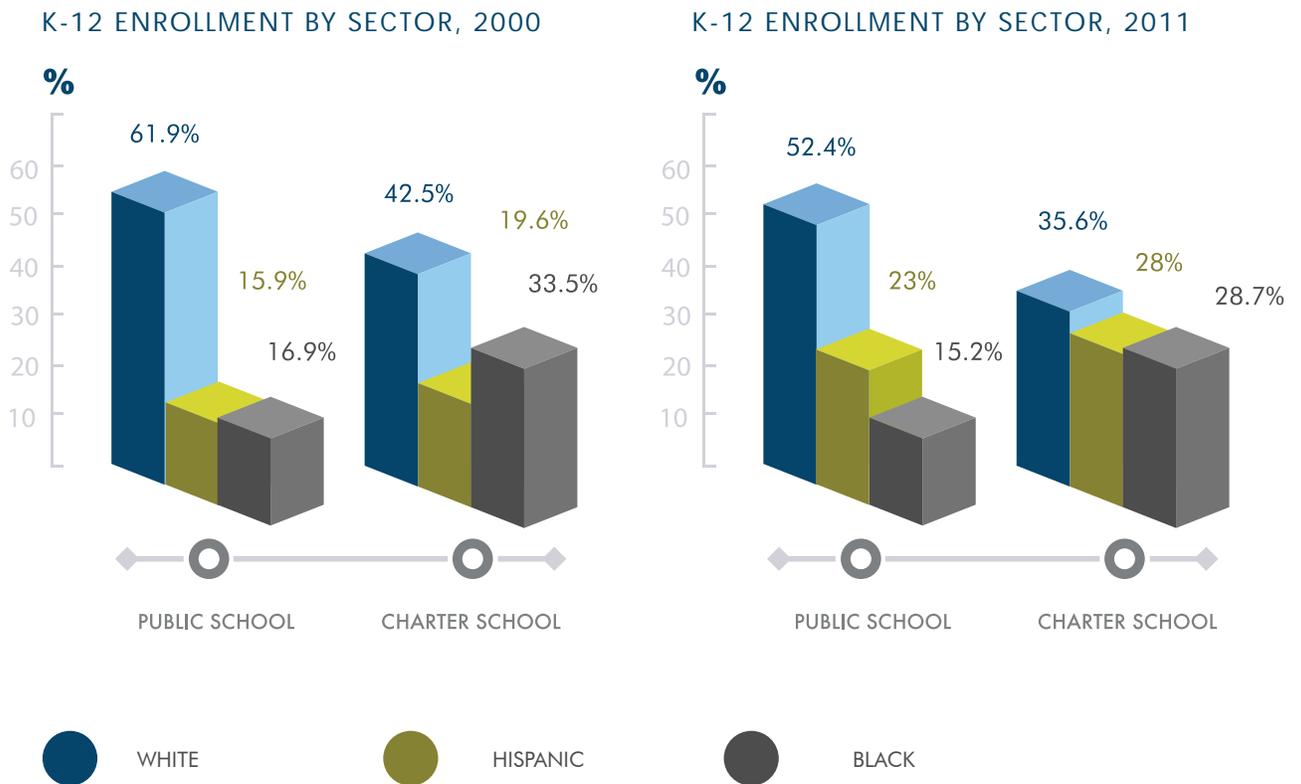
Of Latinos enrolled in school in 2013, 12% were enrolled in preschool and kindergarten; 45% were in grades 1–8; 22% were in high school (grades 9–12); and the remaining 20.8% were in college or graduate school.³⁴

- Latino enrollment in charter schools is increasing.

In the 2011–12 school year, Latinos made up about 23% of total enrollment in traditional public schools and a slightly higher share (28%) of total charter school enrollment. This is a much larger share compared to 2000, when they made up 15.9% of traditional public school enrollment and 19.6% of charter school enrollment.³⁵

See Figure 4 for K–12 enrollment by race/ethnicity in traditional public and charter schools.

Figure 4: K-12 ENROLLMENT BY SECTOR, 2000 & 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Education, "Digest of Education Statistics 2013." Washington, DC, 2013.

- Hispanic students have made gains in standardized exams, but they still lag behind other children. From 2000 to 2013, the percentage of eighth-grade Hispanic students achieving at or above proficiency in math more than doubled.³⁶ However, reading scores for eighth-grade students were far below those of Whites, with only 22% of Hispanic students scoring in the "at or above proficient" category compared to 46% of Whites. In another example, only 26% of Hispanic fourth-grade math students scored "at or above proficient," compared to the national average of 54%.³⁷

- The Hispanic dropout rate has decreased over the last two decades. In 2012, the Hispanic dropout rate was at an all-time low, with 12.7% of 16- to 24-year-olds dropping out of high school, less than half of the rate in 1993 (27.5%).³⁸ Yet the 2012 Latino dropout rates is still much higher than the rates for Whites (4.3%) and Blacks (7.5%).³⁹
- Hispanic high school graduation rates are improving, but remain below the national average. In 2012, Latino students had a high school completion rate, which includes receiving a high

school diploma or equivalent certificate, of only 73%. While this rate is well below the national average of 80%, this figure represents a significant increase from the low of 61% for Latino students in 1993.^{40/41}

- Latino students have closed the equity gap for most Advanced Placement (AP) exams, but gaps remain in the sciences.

The equity gap—the Hispanic share of the graduating class compared to the Hispanic share of AP exam takers—was equal in 2013.⁴² Despite achieving proportional representation, the College Board estimated that only four out of 10 Hispanic students with the potential to succeed in AP science coursework took such a course.⁴³ Successful completion of AP exams can prepare students to excel in their collegiate experience by exposing them to rigorous content and providing an opportunity to earn college credit before graduating from high school.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: POPULATION GROWTH IN NEW REGIONS

There has been a significant increase in the number of English language learners (ELLs) in the U.S., and a large proportion of these students are Spanish speakers. Since 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has been in place to address the needs of students, with additional provisions added in 1968 to help ELL students achieve English language proficiency.⁴⁴ However, criteria used to determine the designation of ELLs varies widely across states.⁴⁵ Therefore, a student may qualify as an ELL in one state and not

in another. Research shows that fair assessments, adequate resources, and the involvement of parents and community members are necessary in meeting the educational needs of ELLs.⁴⁶

*To reach better educational outcomes as a nation, all students, including the growing ELL population, must have **access to supports** necessary to foster academic success.*

- Spanish speakers make up the vast majority of ELLs.

More than 4.6 million students were classified as ELLs during the 2009–2010 school year. Of those, 80% were from a Spanish-speaking background.⁴⁷ Spanish was listed as the most frequently spoken language among ELLs in 42 states and Washington DC.⁴⁸

- ELL national test scores lag far behind those of their peers.

In 2013 only 14% of fourth-grade ELLs scored proficient or above in math and only 7% scored proficient or above in reading.⁴⁹ Non-ELL students fare far better: 45% of non-ELL fourth-graders tested proficient or above in math and 38% tested proficient or above in reading.⁵⁰

- Immigrant children and youth are likely underserved in English proficiency programs. In the 2009–2010 school year only 26.7%⁵¹ of immigrant children and youth⁵² enrolled in schools were served under ESEA Title III immigrant funds.⁵³ Therefore, the vast majority may not be receiving the support necessary to improve their English proficiency.⁵⁴

- The ELL population increased throughout the United States, but some regions experienced enormous growth in the last decade.

The population of ELL students increased by 7.1% nationally between the 2002 and 2010 school years,⁵⁵ yet ELL enrollment increased by more than 150% between the 2000 and 2010 school years in several states, including many in the Southeast.⁵⁶ These states include South Carolina, Kentucky, Nevada, Delaware, Arkansas, Kansas, and Mississippi.

HIGHER EDUCATION: THE 21ST-CENTURY STUDENT

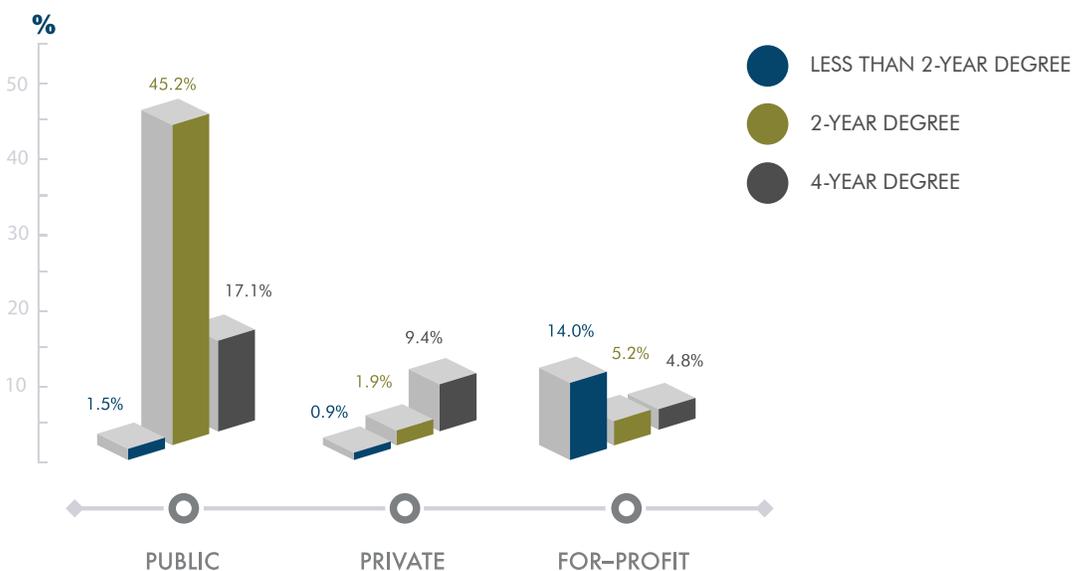
Latinos are enrolled in college in growing numbers, but their completion rates continue to lag behind those of other student groups. For several decades, the Higher Education Act has, among other things, provided financial support to low-income students

pursuing postsecondary degrees. Despite increased access and supports, Latino students are not graduating at the same rates as their racial/ethnic counterparts. Latino students will play a critical role in meeting national degree attainment goals; it is estimated that by 2020 a total of 5.5 million degrees must be awarded to Latino students to meet President Obama’s ambitious goal of having the highest rate of degree completion worldwide.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is imperative to continue growing the number of Latino students enrolled in college but also address barriers to graduation.

- Hispanic students are attending college in record numbers.

The share of Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in postsecondary education increased by 24.1 percentage points between 1972 and 2012, from 13.4% to 37.5%.⁵⁸

Figure 5: LATINO POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT BY SECTOR, 2009



Source: NCLR analysis using data from U.S. Department of Education, “Beginning Postsecondary Students, BPS: 2009.” Washington, DC, 2009.

- Latinos are less likely to be enrolled at four-year institutions.

The majority (45.2%) of Latinos enrolled in a postsecondary institution attend public two-year community colleges. Public four-year universities account for 17.1% of Latino enrollment followed by private for-profit college (less than two-year institutions), with 14% of this population. Latinos are enrolled in other sectors at varying rates.⁵⁹

See Figure 5 for total enrollment by sector.

- Degree completion for Latino students lags behind others.

Slightly over half (51.9%) of all Latino students complete bachelor's degrees within six years, which is less than the completion rates in the same time period for Asian/Pacific Islanders (70.1%) and Whites (62.5%).

The attainment rates are also highly correlated with university selectivity, with the most selective institutions **graduating Latino** *students with four-year degrees at a rate of 85.0% within six years.*⁶⁰

Less selective institutions, such as those with open admissions policies (e.g., online or for-profit schools), graduate less than one-third of Latino students within six years.⁶¹

- The Latino share of advanced degrees is low.

In 2012, 9.8% of all bachelor's degrees were conferred on Latino students.⁶² However, only 7.7% of master's degrees⁶³ and 6.1% of doctoral degrees⁶⁴ in that school year were conferred on Latinos. The lack of Latinos with graduate degrees

means that there is likely less Latino representation in academia, research, and high-level jobs across all industries.

- Latinos receive less federal financial aid than their peers.

Although 74.4% of Hispanic students applied for financial aid in 2012, only 60% received some sort of financial aid, and 50% of applicants received a Pell Grant, a grant awarded to students with demonstrated financial need.^{65/66} Nearly half of Latinos applying for aid (49%) borrowed to attend an institution,⁶⁷ making the financing of higher education an increasingly private good. During the 2007–2008 year, the average amount of financial aid received by a Hispanic full-time undergraduate was \$11,400, whereas White students received an average of \$12,900 and Black students received an average of \$13,500 in financial aid.⁶⁸

- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are a growing sector in postsecondary education. The number of HSIs has grown significantly over the past two decades. In the 2012–2013 school year, the majority (59%) of Latino students were enrolled in HSIs. In 1994, there were 189 HSIs identified, but by the 2012–2013 school year there were 370.⁶⁹ To qualify as an HSI, an institution must, among other things, have 25% of their full-time-equivalent students identify as Latino. Therefore, while the overall rate of Hispanics enrolled in postsecondary institutions increased, this growth appears to have been concentrated at certain institutions rather than across all institutions nationwide, likely resulting in the increased number of HSIs.

CONCLUSION

Latinos have experienced great gains in terms of access to educational opportunities and in overall educational outcomes, including increased participation in Head Start, improved math and reading scores, decreased dropout rates, and increased college enrollment.

*While Latinos show progress in several areas, there are opportunities for **improvement** in other critical areas such as reaching proficiency in math and high school and college completion.*

Therefore, policymakers and advocates continue to have a significant role to play in ensuring that policies help Hispanic students perform in the classroom and beyond. As the Hispanic student population grows, their success will be critical to reaching national degree attainment goals and maintaining a well-equipped workforce in a competitive global economy.

Currently, a range of programs exist to increase Hispanic students' chances for academic success, and it is important to keep these programs strong to maintain progress. For example, effective implementation and continued funding of early childhood education programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start are necessary. Additionally, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a law that provides assistance for special populations including low-income students and ELLs, is due for reauthorization. As the ESEA reaches its 50th anniversary, it is imperative to continue funding and maintain accountability provisions to track

the progress of ELLs and other vulnerable students. The Higher Education Act is also due for reauthorization. As Latino participation in higher education grows, policymakers should take action to improve federal financial aid programs and increase support for Hispanic-Serving Institutions to help ensure that disparities in degree completion are addressed.

Finally, the implications of demographic trends among the U.S. student population are immense, and policymakers must work to ensure that the U.S. education system evolves in a way that facilitates success. Latinos have a growing presence in classrooms across the country, particularly in states that traditionally have had smaller concentrations of Latinos. As student demographics change drastically, educational systems in some states may require additional resources, such as additional professional development for educators and administrators to educate Latino students. Policymakers must provide greater supports and protections for Latino students. Existing programs such as GEAR UP and TRIO, which are intended to prepare students for higher education, can be strengthened to ensure that students develop the knowledge necessary to succeed in their postsecondary education. As the Latino student population continues to grow across the entire educational system, schools, teachers, and policies alike must provide them with the support and resources necessary to achieve academic success.

ENDNOTES

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⁸ / Data presented in this brief was obtained from several sources. In some cases, data was not available for all years in all datasets. Therefore, comparison years in this brief may vary based on best available data.

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