THE STATE OF EDUCATION FOR
LATINO STUDENTS
Latino students make up the largest racial or ethnic group in U.S. public schools after white students — and the Latino student population is growing faster than that of any other group. Clearly, the success of Latino students is critical to the success of our nation as a whole. So it’s encouraging that, by nearly every measure, achievement for Latino students has risen over time. As a nation, we’ve made real progress in educating Latino students. But we can’t rest on our laurels: Despite improvements, Latino students still lag behind their white peers on key measures of achievement and attainment.

In this brief, we present the best available national data on the growth of the Latino student population and on Latino student achievement and attainment in both K-12 and postsecondary education. We hope that these data will be used both to celebrate our nation’s improvements and to motivate us to do even more.
What are the trends in Latino student enrollment?

Nationwide, Latino students make up nearly 25 percent of public school students — the largest group after white students. Moreover, Latinos are the fastest growing major ethnic group in U.S. public schools. Currently, about 11.4 million Latino students attend American public schools — an increase of 49 percent between 2001 and 2011. By the 2022-2023 school year, 30 percent of public school students will be Latino.

Many of these students need additional support to master the English language. Between 2003 and 2011, the number of English learners in American public schools increased by 14 percent — and Latino students make up the bulk of students learning English.
Is performance for Latino students improving in key academic subjects?

Reading and math achievement for Latino students has improved over time, and gaps between Latino students and their white peers have narrowed.

In fourth grade, Latino students’ reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rose by 7 points between 2003 and 2013, compared with 4 points for white students. In eighth grade, Latino students’ math scores rose nearly twice as fast as white students’ scores: 13 points, compared with 7 points for white students.

These gains have translated into meaningful improvements in Latino students’ knowledge and skills. For example, from 1992 to 2013, the percentage of Latino eighth-graders without basic math skills — who struggle to apply arithmetic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) or use diagrams, charts, and graphs to help solve problems — fell by nearly half.
And gains aren’t limited to the lowest performance levels. In 1992, only 10 percent of Latino fourth-graders read at the proficient or advanced level on NAEP; by 2013, that percentage had **nearly doubled**. Only 6 percent of Latino eighth-graders were proficient or advanced in math in 1992. But fast forward 20 years, and that had **more than tripled**.

It’s important, of course, to look at student performance across subjects and grades, but these two are especially critical. Research shows that without solid reading skills honed in elementary school and a firm grasp of math by the end of middle school, it is difficult for students to do well going forward.
Despite these improvements, performance for Latino students remains far too low, and Latino students trail behind their white peers.

In 2013, **19 percent** of Latino fourth-graders read at a proficient or advanced level on NAEP, compared with **45 percent** of white fourth-graders.

And in eighth-grade math, trends were similar. White eighth-graders were over **twice** as likely as Latino students to be proficient or advanced in math.
Latinos have made big gains in meeting key benchmarks of college and career readiness while in high school. The number of Latinos who leave high school having taken the ACT has nearly doubled in just five years, while the number of Latino students who leave high school having taken the SAT has increased by more than a third. And the number of Latino graduates taking at least one AP exam more than tripled between 2002 and 2012, outpacing the growth in the number of Latino graduates.

Still, far too few Latino high schoolers are being adequately prepared — despite these impressive gains. Among Latino students with high potential for success in AP math, just 3 out of 10 took any such course. Only 4 out of 10 Latino students with high potential for AP science took an AP science course.

And fewer than half of Latino graduates who took the ACT met any of its college-readiness benchmarks, which are intended to show whether students have a good chance of succeeding in first-year college courses. Only 1 in 7 met all four — compared with 1 in 3 white graduates who took the ACT.
Seventy-three percent of Latino students graduate from high school in four years — which means that 1 in 4 do not graduate on time.

And just 71 percent of young Latino high school graduates who were interested in joining the military met the minimum academic entry requirements for the U.S. Army. That’s substantially lower than the 84 percent of their white peers who met the minimum requirements.

**2012 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduation Rate</strong></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>86</td>
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**Percent Meeting Minimum Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of ASVAB Test-Takers Meeting Minimum Entry Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>84</td>
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What are the trends in Latino college-going?

Overall, more Latino students are going to college than ever before. The percent of recent Latino high school graduates enrolled in college the following fall reached an all-time high of **69 percent**, up from just **55 percent** 10 years ago. In 2012, Latino students represented **16 percent** of all undergraduates, compared with **11 percent** in 2002.

Where are Latino students going to college?

Despite these large gains in access, Latino students are more likely than their white peers to attend for-profit colleges or community colleges, where their chances of earning a degree are lower. **Twelve percent** of Latino students begin college at for-profit colleges, and another **45 percent** begin at public community colleges.

Only **16 percent** of Latino students begin at traditional four-year research universities (private or nonprofit). Among white students, however, only **7 percent** begin at for-profit colleges, and **36 percent** begin at public community colleges. **Twenty-four percent** begin at public or private nonprofit, four-year research universities.
Graduation rates for Latino students are moving in the right direction, but these small gains are not enough. Six-year graduation rates for Latino students have inched up to 52 percent from 46 percent in 2002, but that’s still far below the 63 percent graduation rate for white students.

At public two-year colleges, 18 percent of Latino students earn an associate degree or certificate within three years compared with 24 percent of white students. Of those students who initially enrolled at any two-year college with the intent to transfer, white students are twice as likely as Latino students (22 versus 11 percent) to transfer to a four-year institution within three years.

As a result, large bachelor’s degree attainment gaps remain: In 2013, 16 percent of Latinos ages 25-29 held at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 40 percent of white young adults.
Are some states, districts, schools, and higher education institutions doing better than others for Latino students?

No state is doing as well by Latino students as it should, but some are doing far better than others. On NAEP, for example, the percentage of Latino fourth-graders reaching the proficient or advanced level in reading is over **twice as high** in Florida as in California.

The same is true of districts. Low-income Latino eighth-graders in Houston and Dallas are nearly **three times as likely** to be proficient or advanced in math as those in Fresno, California, and over twice as likely to be proficient in math as those in Los Angeles.
Similarly, some schools are helping their Latino students achieve at sky-high levels. For example, at Laurel Street Elementary in Compton, California, where nearly 80 percent of students are Latino, 100 percent of Latino fourth-graders were proficient in math in 2013, and 91 percent were proficient in reading. That’s compared with only 66 percent and 54 percent of Latino fourth-graders statewide.
At Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary in Miami, where virtually all students are Latino and more than half are English learners, **73 percent** of Latino fifth-graders were proficient in reading in 2013, compared with **56 percent** of Latino students who were proficient statewide.

And at University Park Campus School in Worcester, Massachusetts, half the students are Latino — and **100 percent** of Latino students in the class of 2013 graduated on time, compared with **67 percent** of Latino students statewide.
Institutions of higher education are no different. There are many examples of significant and sustained improvement in graduation rates for Latino students that surpass the small national increases.

Stony Brook University, a research university in New York, is one example. From 2004 to 2012, graduation rates for Hispanic students increased by 20 points, from 41.8 percent to 61.8 percent. Over this time, Stony Brook almost managed to close an 11.5 percentage point gap with white students while simultaneously increasing student success overall.
Similarly, San Diego State University has also seen steady increases in the success of its Latino students. Graduation rates nearly doubled from 31.4 percent in 2002 to 61.3 percent in 2012.

These schools — and others across the country — show that Latino students can soar. It’s up to all of us to help them do so.
What are the trends in Latino student enrollment?


Is performance for Latino students improving in key academic subjects?


Are schools performing well enough for Latino students?


Are schools preparing Latino students for college and careers?

- **ACT participation and college readiness:** ACT, “The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: National” (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2013), http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr13/pdf/CCCR13-NationalReadinessRpt.pdf. College readiness benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses.


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**Are Latino students graduating ready for the next step?**


What are the trends in Latino college-going?


Where are Latino students going to college?


Are Latino students graduating from college?


Are some states, districts, schools, and higher education institutions doing better than others for Latino students?

- **Percent proficient/advanced on NAEP by state and by district:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Main NAEP Data Explorer, http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/. Only selected states are shown on the chart.

- **Laurel Street Elementary School demographics and proficiency rates:** California Department of Education, 2013, DataQuest, http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.


- **Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary School proficiency rates:** Florida Department of Education, FCAT 2.0: Student Performance Results: Demographic Report, https://app1.fldoe.org/FCATDemographics/.

- **University Park Campus School demographics and proficiency rates:** Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School/District Profiles, http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/.


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