

Latino Students and U.S. High Schools

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by the year 2050, about 50 percent of the U.S. population will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian.¹ These relatively youthful minority populations—Hispanics in particular—will drive demographic growth and diversification well into the twenty-first century.

Nearly five million Latino students were enrolled in America's public schools in the 1993–94 school year.² By 2005–06, that number had doubled.³ Over the past two decades, the percentage of Latino students in U.S. elementary and secondary schools has grown significantly, while the percentage of white students has declined and that of African American students has held steady.⁴

This demographic reality and its impact on the future economic and social well-being of the United States is one of many reasons why it is imperative to educate these students to high standards. However, current statistics demonstrate that there is a wide achievement and attainment gap that must be bridged before that goal is met.

Graduation, Dropouts, and Preparedness

The nation's high schools are failing too many Latino youth. Latino high school students are behind their white counterparts in graduation rates, dropout rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness rates.

- Hispanic students made up 17 percent of the high school population during the 2005–06 school year.⁵
- In 2005, only 58 percent of all Hispanic students graduated from high school on time, compared to 78 percent of whites.⁶
- The national on-time graduation rate for Hispanic males was 52 percent in 2005; for white males, it was 74 percent.⁷
- In 2000, 44 percent of Hispanic young adults born outside the United States dropped out of high school.⁸
- Only 20 percent of Hispanic students leave high school prepared for college, compared to 40 percent of whites.⁹
- Of students entering college, only 7 percent are Hispanic, while 76 percent are white.¹⁰
- By the end of high school, Latino students have math and reading skills that are comparable to white middle school students.¹¹
- The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that 86 percent of Hispanic eighth graders read below grade level, compared to 62 percent of white eighth graders.¹²
- Seventy-one percent of eighth grade students who are English language learners (ELL) test considerably below grade level in reading, compared with 25 percent of non-ELL students.¹³
- Dropout rates for immigrant students vary widely by subgroup with educational differences influenced by country of origin, age at time of immigration to the United States, and whether ELL students are from first-, second-, or third-generation immigrant families.¹⁴

Schools, Segregation, and Teacher Quality

A disproportionate number of failing schools, across grade levels, serve predominantly poor and minority students. These segregated schools tend to have fewer financial, human, and material resources than schools in more affluent areas. By the time students who attend these schools reach high school, the academic challenges they face have been compounded by years of substandard education.

- Seventy-five percent of Latino students attend segregated schools in which minorities comprise 50 percent or more of the student population.¹⁵
- Thirty-five percent of Latino students attend intensely segregated schools where minority students comprise at least 90 percent of the student population.¹⁶
- One ninth of Latino students attend schools where 99 to 100 percent of the student body is composed of minority students.¹⁷
- Nine percent of white children are enrolled in minority-predominant school districts, in comparison with two thirds of Latino children.¹⁸
- Latino youth are concentrated in central cities and thus are more likely to attend schools that are overcrowded and underfunded. In California, for example, about 16 percent of the teachers in schools attended by Hispanic students are not fully credentialed, which is twice the percentage for schools predominantly attended by white students.¹⁹
- Between 1994 and 2000, there was a 38 percent increase in the Latino student population, compared to a 13 percent increase in black public school enrollment and a decline of 1.2 percent in white public school enrollment during the same time period.²⁰
- Latinos and African Americans comprise 80 percent of the student population in extreme-poverty schools where 90 to 100 percent of the population is considered poor.²¹
- Nationally, almost half of ELL students attend schools where 30 percent or more of their fellow students are also ELL students.²²
- Nationwide, 31 percent of ELL high school students had teachers who did not have a major, minor, or certification in the field of bilingual education.²³

Special, Gifted, and College Preparatory Education

Statistics show that Latino students experience disparities in other important areas of education. However, there are promising trends in some areas.

- Latino students identified as in need of special education are about twice as likely as white students to be removed from a general education setting and placed in a restrictive educational environment.²⁴
- Overall, 36 percent of Latino students classified as having learning disabilities spend the majority of their day in separate settings, such as restricted classrooms or schools, compared with only 20 percent of the white students who are classified as having learning disabilities.²⁵
- At 34 percent, Hispanic twelfth graders had the highest percentage of long-term absenteeism (three days or more) of any other racial or ethnic group.²⁶
- Between 1984 and 2000, the number of Hispanics who took Advanced Placement (AP) exams increased dramatically, from twenty-two to 117 students per one thousand twelfth graders. However, at the same time the number of white students taking AP exams increased from forty-nine to 183 per one thousand twelfth graders.²⁷
- From 1991 to 2008, the percentage of SAT takers who were Latino increased from 3 percent to only 12 percent.²⁸
- Between 2002 and 2006, Latino graduates improved their average composite, English, mathematics, reading, and science scores on the ACT.²⁹
- The proportion of U.S. college students who are Hispanic increased from 4 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 2006.³⁰



Endnotes

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