

Latino Students and U.S. High Schools

The United States Census Bureau projects that by the year 2050, about 50 percent of the U.S. population will be African-American, Hispanic, or Asian (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). These relatively youthful minority populations—Hispanics in particular—will drive future demographic growth and diversification well into the twenty-first century.

Nearly five million Latino students were enrolled in America's public schools in 1993–94. By the 2007–08 school year, that number will grow to about nine million (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education 2003). 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 (NCES 2006).

This demographic reality makes it imperative to educate these students to high standards if the United States is to maintain its global preeminence. However, current statistics make it clear 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 many Latino youth. Latino high school students are notably falling behind their white counterparts in graduation rates, dropout rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness rates.

- In 2003, only 53 percent of all Hispanic students graduated from high school on time, compared to 78 percent of whites (Greene and Winters 2006).
- In 2003, the on-time graduation rate for Hispanic males was 49 percent nationally; for white males, it was 74 percent (Greene and Winters 2006).
- In 2000, 44 percent of Hispanic young adults born outside the United States dropped out of high school (ASPIRA 2004).
- Only 20 percent of Hispanic students leave high school prepared for college, compared to 40 percent of whites (Greene and Winters 2005).
- Of students entering college, only 7 percent were Hispanic, while 76 percent were white (Greene and Winters 2005).
- By the end of high school, Latino students have math and reading skills that are comparable to white middle school students (The Education Trust 2003).
- The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 86 percent of Hispanic eighth graders read below grade level, compared to 63 percent of white eighth graders (U.S. Department of Education, NAEP 2005).
- 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 (U.S. Department of Education, NAEP 2005).
- 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 (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell 2000).

Schools, Segregation, and Teacher Quality

A disproportionate number of failing schools, across grade levels, are predominantly comprised of poor, racial, and ethnic 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 (Orfield and Yun 1999).
- Thirty-five percent of Latino students attend intensely segregated schools where minority students comprise at least 90 percent of the student population (Orfield and Yun 1999).
- One-ninth of Latino students attend schools where 99 to 100 percent of the student body is composed of minority students (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield 2003).
- Nine percent of white children are enrolled in minority-predominant school districts, in comparison with two-thirds of Latino children (Pew Hispanic Center 2002a).
- 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 attended by white students (Pew Hispanic Center 2002b).
- In the last six years, there has been 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 (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield 2003).
- 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 (Orfield and Lee 2005).
- Nationally, almost half of the ELL students attend schools where 30 percent or more of their fellow students are also ELL students (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell 2000).
- 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 (Seastrom et al. 2002).

Special, Gifted, and College Preparatory Education

Statistics show that Latino students experience disparities in other important areas of education.

- 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 (Harvard Civil Rights Project 2002).
- 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 white students classified as having learning disabilities (Education Law Center 2004).
- 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 (Hoffman, Llagas, and Snyder 2003).
- Between 1984 and 2000, the number of Hispanics who took Advanced Placement (AP) exams increased dramatically, from 22 to 117 students per 1,000 twelfth graders, while the number of white students taking the exams increased from 49 to 183 per 1,000 twelfth graders during this same time period (NCES 2003; Hoffman, Llagas, and Snyder 2003).
- From 1991 to 2001, the percent of Latino students who took the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) increased only slightly, from 7 percent to 9 percent (Hoffman, Llagas, and Snyder 2003).
- The proportion of U.S. college students who were Hispanic increased from 4 percent in 1980 to 10 percent in 2000 while the percentage of white college students declined from 81 percent in 1980 to 61 percent in 2000 (Hoffman, Llagas, and Snyder 2003).



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