

Hispanic Education in California

OVERVIEW

In the 2001-2002 school year, Latinos constituted more than two in five (44.2%) of the approximately 6.1 million students enrolled in California public elementary and secondary schools, the largest segment of the student population.¹ From 1981 to 2001, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who are Hispanic more than doubled, accounting for 79.6% of the overall increase in California's student population between those years.² Despite representing such a large proportion of the California student population, there is still a significant disparity between Hispanic children and their non-Hispanic peers on nearly all important measures of educational progress.

Early Childhood Education

- **Early childhood education and development is critical to success for Latino children in school, yet Latinos are underrepresented in early childhood programs.*** While 48% of children in California between 0-5 years old are Latino, only 24% of children who attend preschool before kindergarten are Latino, compared to 57% of White students and over 40% for both Asian and Black students.³
- **Latinos do tend to participate in early childhood development programs to the extent that they are available and accessible.** For the year 2001, almost two-thirds (65.8%) of those enrolled in the Head Start program in California, a federally-funded child development program for very low-income young children and their families, were Latino, a significantly larger portion than that of any other racial/ethnic group (Whites-12.7%, Blacks-13.6%, and Asians-6.0%).⁴

* Underutilization by Latinos of early childhood programs could be attributed to affordability, language barriers, eligibility and documentation requirements, and family child care preferences, but more research is needed in this area.

Elementary and Secondary Education

- **Latino students represent the largest ethnic population in California public elementary and secondary schools.**

According to the California Department of Education, Hispanic students composed 2.7 million (44.2%) of California's 6.1 million students in the 2001-2002 school year. In comparison, non-Hispanic Whites accounted for 2.1 million students (34.8%), Asians for nearly 500,000 students (8.1%), and Blacks for slightly over 500,000 students (8.3%).⁵

- **Hispanics continue to be underrepresented in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program.**

Despite representing close to half of all students in California schools, Latinos constituted 22% of the student population enrolled in the GATE program in the 2001-2002 school year. While this percentage is greater than that of participating Asian (15.8%) and Black (4.3%) students, it is significantly smaller than the percentage of enrollees who were non-Hispanic White (51.6%).⁶

- **Latinos are not being adequately prepared to complete the high school courses necessary for entrance into University of California and California State University campuses.*** One in five (22.9%) Latino 12th-grade graduates met the requirements for UC and/or CSU admission in the 2000-2001 school year, compared to 40.6% of non-Hispanic White students, 26.1% of African American students, and 58.4% of Asian students.⁷

- **Hispanic students are the least likely of all ethnic/racial groups to take the SAT I and/or ACT exams.** Latinos accounted for one in three (33.9%) 12th graders in 2000. However, only about one in five (19.0%) of those high school seniors who completed either the SAT or ACT was Latino. Similarly, only 21.2% of Latino 12th graders participated in the SAT and/or ACT exams, compared to 55.8% of Asians, 29.8% of African Americans, and 30.9% of White 12th graders.⁸

* The courses required for entrance into UC and CSU schools are also known as the "a-g" requirements, and must be completed with a grade of "C" or better. The requirements include specified courses in history/social science (2 years), English (4 years), mathematics (3 years), laboratory science (2 years), a language other than English (2 years), visual and performing arts (1 year), and college preparatory electives (1 year). For more information on the "a-g" requirements, see the University of California's a-g interactive guide at <http://www.ucop.edu/a-gGuide>.

Dropouts and High School Graduation

- **Latino students are more likely to drop out of high school than their Asian and non-Hispanic White peers.** In the 2000-2001 school year, the one-year dropout rate* for Latino students in grades 9-12 was 3.8%. This is less than the rate for African Americans (4.9%), but is more than double the rate for non-Hispanic Whites (1.7%) and Asians (1.5%).⁹
- **Hispanic students make up more than half of all high school dropouts.** Of the nearly 48,000 dropouts in grades 9-12 in the 2000-2001 school year, Latinos composed the majority (52.1%). Whites followed, accounting for 23.7% of dropouts in California public high schools. Blacks represented 14.9% of dropouts, and Asians represented only 4.9% of dropouts in grades 9-12 for the same school year.¹⁰
- **Latinos are less likely to have obtained a high school diploma than their Black, White, and Asian counterparts.** In 1990, only 45% of Hispanics 25 years old and over had obtained a high school diploma or higher. In comparison, 75.6% of Blacks, 77.2% of Asians, and 81.1% of Whites in this age group had the same educational attainment.¹¹

English Language Learner (ELL) Students

- **English Language Learner (ELL) students represent about one in four California students.** In the 2001-2002 school year, there were approximately 1.6 million ELL students in California's public schools, representing approximately 25% of all students in grades kindergarten through 12. The majority of these students are Spanish-speaking (83.5%), and nearly 70% of ELLs are enrolled in kindergarten through grade 6.¹²
- **California's ELL students are placed in specific programs in accordance with the regulations established by Proposition 227.**** For the 2001-2002 school year, 48% of ELLs were enrolled in structured

* The California Department of Education (CDE) calculates the one-year dropout rate, or "event" dropout rate, by dividing the number of grade 9-12 enrollees by the number of grade 9-12 dropouts, and multiplying that number by 100. The California Hispanic dropout rate differs significantly from national figures, which are based on the "status" dropout rate (the number of 16- to 24-year-olds without a diploma who are not in school or in a GED program). The status dropout rate is often cited as a more accurate measure of dropping out because, unlike the event dropout rate, it does not discontinue counting students if they have been out of school for more than one year.

** Proposition 227, passed in June of 1998, requires that ELLs be taught overwhelmingly in English through sheltered/structured English immersion (SEI) programs not normally expected to exceed one year, and then transferred to mainstream English-language classrooms; bilingual instruction is permitted only through the granting of a special waiver.

English immersion settings; 33% were placed in mainstream classrooms and met the criteria for having a reasonable level of English proficiency; an additional 2% were placed in mainstream classrooms at the request of their parents without having met the criteria; and 11% were placed in alternative programs, such as bilingual instruction programs, as a result of an approved parental waiver.¹³

- **Proposition 227 has not significantly increased the redesignation rates* of students.** A 2002 report on the effects of implementation of Proposition 227 on the education of ELLs found that more than half of the schools (54%) and nearly three-quarters of the districts (72%) surveyed reported that the Proposition had no influence on redesignation, while 39% of school survey respondents and half as many

district respondents (21%) perceived an increase in redesignation. Seven percent of both schools and districts reported a decrease in the number of ELLs redesignated as a result of the Proposition.¹⁴

- **ELLs are significantly less likely to pass California's high school graduation exam than the general population.** The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) measures secondary students' academic achievement. For the 2002 administration of the CAHSEE, 18% of the ELLs taking the Mathematics portion received passing scores, while 32% of the general population taking the exam passed. In addition, 28% of the ELLs taking the English Language Arts (ELA) portion received passing scores, while 54% of the total student population passed.¹⁵

Postsecondary Education

- **Hispanics are underrepresented in California's public colleges and universities.**** In the fall of 2001, 27.4% of public first-time college freshmen who graduated from a California public high school were Hispanic. White students accounted for the majority of first-time freshmen (38.6%), while Asians constituted

15.3% of all first-time freshmen in the 2001 academic year, and Blacks composed 6.2%.¹⁶

- **Latino students are underrepresented in California public postsecondary institutions.** Despite representing 42.4% of all 18- to 24-year-olds (the traditional college-bound age group) in California, Latinos constituted only 24.3% of all

* The redesignation rate is the percentage of ELL students who are classified from limited English proficiency (LEP) to fluent English proficiency each year. The redesignation rate is often used as a part of the accountability system for a school or district, although it does not provide valid data on program effectiveness.

** Public colleges and universities in the context of this fact sheet include only the University of California, California State University campuses, and California Community Colleges.

students enrolled in California's public colleges in the fall of 2000. Comparatively, Whites were overrepresented in California's public colleges; their share of the college population was 40.2%, while they represent only 35.7% of the 18- to 24-year-old population in California. The Asian student population was slightly overrepresented among students at 13.0%, given that this group composes 11.3% of 18- to 24-year-olds. Finally, the Black student population was proportionate to their representation in the 18- to 24-year-old population: 6.5% to 6.4%, respectively.¹⁷

■ **Proposition 209* resulted in an overall decrease of already underrepresented students in postsecondary institutions, with the most acute effect occurring at the University of California (UC) campuses.** In 1995, UC had its most diverse undergraduate student population to date (21% of incoming freshmen). By

2001, only 17% of incoming freshmen were underrepresented students, increasing slightly to 19% by 2002.** While Latino students constituted 13.2% of entering UC freshmen in 1997, the proportion dropped to 11.8% in 1998 and regained some ground in 2001 at 13%, but remained lower than pre-Proposition 209 levels.¹⁸

■ **Latinos in California are less likely than their Black, White, and Asian counterparts to have received a bachelor's degree or higher.** In 1990, only 7.1% of Hispanics 25 years old and over held a bachelor's degree or higher. Blacks were twice as likely as Latinos to possess a college degree (14.8%), Whites three times as likely (25.4%), and Asians were almost five times as likely (34.1%).¹⁹ Only 8.4% of working Latinos in California were found to have a bachelor's degree or higher in 1998, compared to 23.5% of Black, 32.9% of White, and 43.4% of Asian workers.²⁰

* In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209 to end the use of race, gender, and ethnicity as consideration in public university admissions.

** In 2001, the UC Board of Regents voted to rescind SP-1 and SP-2, its six-year-old policies banning consideration of race and gender in admissions, hiring, and contracting, and approved a comprehensive review process for selecting freshman applicants.

ENDNOTES

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