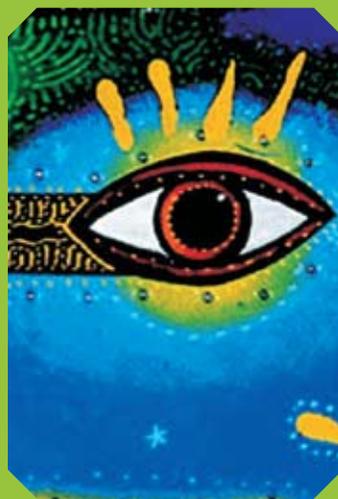




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The Forum for America's Ideas

ENGAGING LATINO COMMUNITIES FOR EDUCATION CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

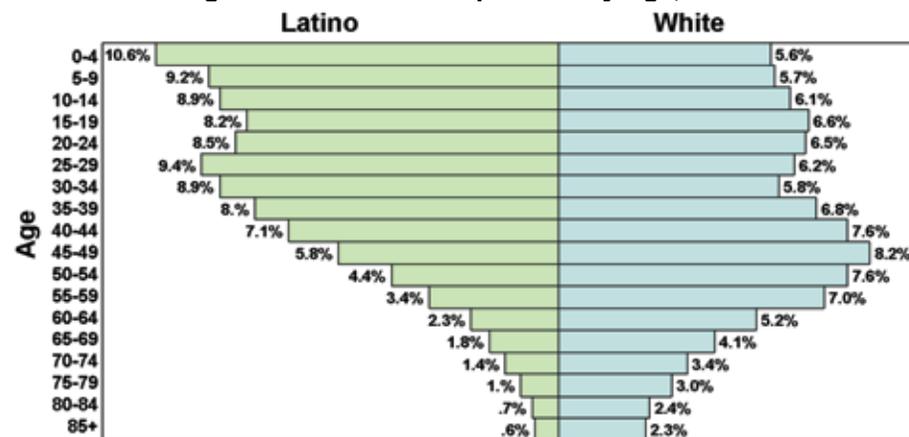


INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Latinos became the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, with a population of almost 40 million. According to census projections, they will comprise a quarter of the nation's population by 2050. Along with this tremendous growth, Latinos have made considerable gains in several areas of education. Despite these gains, however, significant gaps in academic performance remain. Only about half of Latino students graduate from high school on time, and only 9.5 percent earn a bachelor's degree by age 29.

These educational results are particularly relevant because a significant number of Latino children attend U.S. schools. In fact, the Latino population is very young; more than one-third are under age 18. In the most recent census, Latinos represented 16 percent of all U.S. children under age 18, compared to their overall representation of 12 percent in the total population (Figure 1). If current trends persist, it is expected that, by 2020, Latinos will represent nearly one-fourth of all children under age 18.

Figure 1. Percent of Population by Age, 2006



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, *National Population Estimates 2006*, www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2006-asrh.html.

What Is ENLACE?

ENLACE, an acronym for ENgaging LATino Communities for Education, is Spanish for link or weave together. This nationwide project was initiated by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to increase the higher education participation and completion rates for Latino students.

This report, based on the ENLACE model for student success, examines some of the major research in best practices for Latino students and offers policy ideas for state legislators. Although the model intentionally avoids a “one size fits all” approach, program elements usually fit into three categories: Creating a seamless path to college, strengthening student supports, and changing educational institutions. Although this publication highlights the needs of Latino students, most of the research and policy suggestions could apply to and benefit many students, especially other under-represented groups.

ENLACE MODEL OF SUCCESS

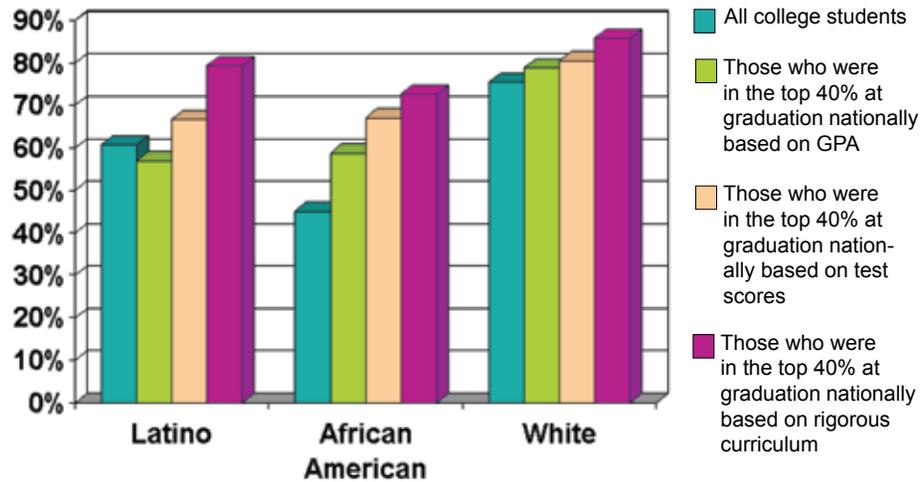
Create a Seamless Path to College

A U.S. Department of Education study found that a rigorous high school curriculum was the most significant predictor of bachelor's degree attainment for all students, regardless of race. The study also found that such a curriculum was three times more effective for Latino students as for white students. In fact, Latinos who enroll in college directly from a rigorous curriculum have a 20 percent greater chance of earning a bachelor's degree than other Latinos—and a 4 percent greater chance than white students—who do not complete such a curriculum (Figure 2).

Above class rank, grades and test scores, a rigorous curriculum is the most significant predictor of college completion.

The Manhattan Institute estimates that only about 20 percent of Latino students complete a college preparatory curriculum in high school. Further, almost six times more white students than Latinos take Advanced Placement tests, and the severity of this lack of academic preparation is demonstrated in the rate of high school graduates who enter college. In 1976, roughly the same percentage of Latino and white high school graduates went on to college. In 2005, however, there was a gap of nearly 19 percentage points. These data show that college enrollment for Latino high school graduates has increased by only 1.5 percentage points in the last 30 years (Figure 3). Among young adults with a college degree, the gap between Latinos and whites is more than 25 percentage points.

Figure 2. College Graduation Percentage by National High School Achievement Indicators



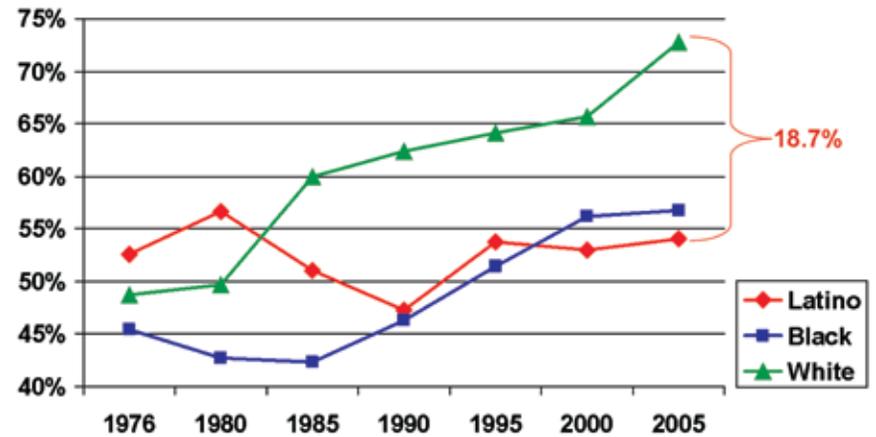
Source: Clifford Adelman, *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*, U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox/toolbox.html.



CREATE A SEAMLESS PATH TO COLLEGE

Of further concern is that the educational gap is evident in earlier grades. White fourth graders score an average of 20 and 26 points higher than Latinos on the National Assessment of Education Progress test in math and reading, respectively. By eighth grade, Latino students are 27 and 25 points behind whites in math and reading, indicating that they are not academically prepared for the rigorous high school curriculum that will prepare them for college. This, in turn, affects how students perform on the ACT and SAT college entrance exams. The average ACT scores of Latino high school students are 18.6, and their average SAT scores are 919. Scores of 20 and 950, respectively, are considered the minimum to enroll in classes at a four-year college without academic remediation.

Figure 3. High School Graduates Who Enroll in College



Source: Mortenson, *College Entrance Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender for Recent High School Graduates 1959 to 2005*, 2006, www.postsecondary.org/SpreadsheetsPW/CollegeEntranceRates.xls.

Table 1. Education Path (Students Enrolled)

| | K-12 | Two-Year Colleges | Four-Year Colleges | BA Degrees Awarded |
|------------------------|-------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Black | 15.6% | 13.3% | 11.7% | 9.5% |
| Latino | 19.7% | 14.8% | 7.8% | 7% |
| Asian | 3.9% | 6.7% | 6.3% | 6.8% |
| Native American | 0.7% | 1.2% | 0.9% | 0.7% |
| White | 57.6% | 62.1% | 68.6% | 72.9% |
| Other | 2.5% | 1.4% | 4.7% | 3.2% |

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05/tf.asp>; Education Trust, *Education Watch the Nation*, Fall 2006, www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/summaries2006/USA.pdf.

In 2005, President George W. Bush outlined a plan to increase the academic competitiveness of U.S. schools. Congress recently provided further incentives to this plan through academic competitiveness grants that will increase Pell grant amounts for low-income students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum. The goal is to provide low-income students (many of whom are Latino) with an incentive to complete a college degree.

CREATE A SEAMLESS PATH TO COLLEGE

To ensure success in the journey to a college degree, ENLACE proposes to start early with students and create a direct educational path that smoothly makes the transition from one level to the next. ENLACE also strives to provide easily accessible college planning and financial aid information for students and families in culturally friendly mediums.

For many Latino students, the path to college has numerous obstacles that steadily detour them. Latinos represent nearly 20 percent of students in K-12 schools, yet constitute only 7 percent of those who are awarded bachelor's degrees annually. Fortunately, policy actions are available that can help students along the educational path. The following ideas have shown potential in creating a seamless path through the educational system.

- **Aligning high school graduation requirements with college admission standards**

States can examine their universities' admissions requirements and compare them to various district graduation requirements. In many states, universities require four years of math, but some school districts require only two or three years of math for graduation.

- **Ensuring that middle school standards in core subjects prepare students for a rigorous curriculum in high school**

Several studies have shown that students who complete just one math class beyond algebra significantly increase their chance of completing a college degree.

- **Offering dual/concurrent enrollment, advanced placement, international baccalaureate or other rigorous curriculum options to all students**

Many low-income schools do not offer a wide range of rigorous curriculum options to students.

- **Considering state leadership groups that connect pre-kindergarten, K-12, and postsecondary governance and foster communication along the P-20 continuum (P-20 Councils)**

Some college preparation efforts begin in ninth grade, and others may begin as late as 11th grade. Studies show that the foundations for children's cognitive development that will prepare them for college begin before kindergarten. It is important to start early with high-risk students and create a path for them to higher education.

- **Integrating data systems that track P-20 progression and movement into the workforce**

Reliable and timely data help policymakers pinpoint areas of highest need. Systems are available in only a few states to track K-12 and postsecondary data for a single student from kindergarten to completion of a college degree. In a few states, data systems can track students as they enter the workforce.

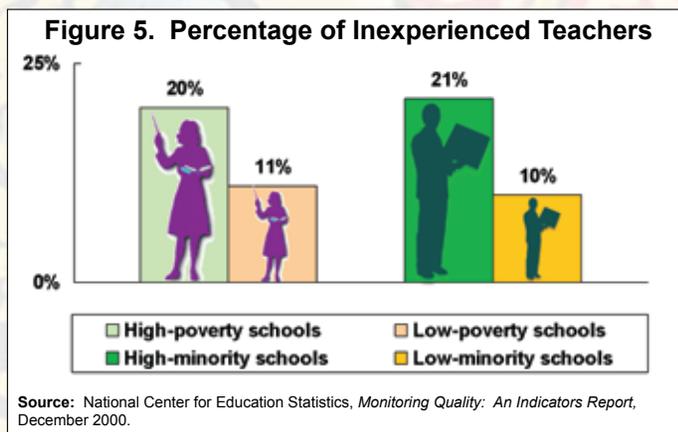
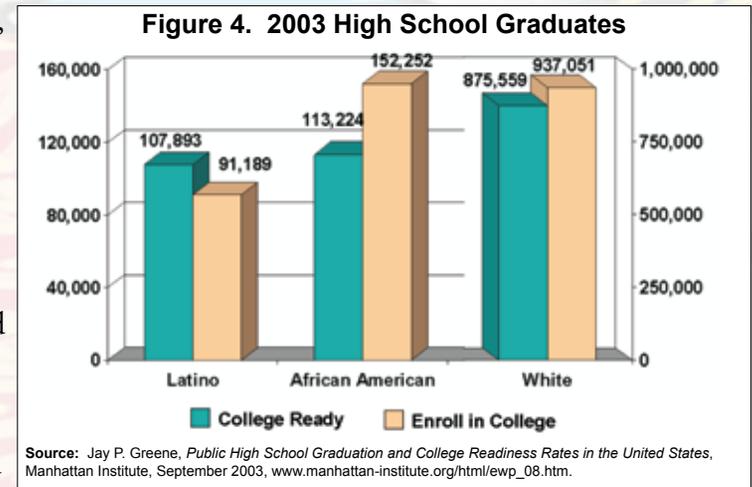


ENLACE MODEL OF SUCCESS

Strengthen Supports for Students

Although a rigorous curriculum and a direct educational path are important, they are not the only factors in student achievement. Only about 85 percent of college-ready Latino high school graduates enroll in college, while more African American and white high school graduates enroll who are not college-ready. These data indicate that, particularly for Latinos, college access involves more than preparation. All students need positive, supportive and quality relationships—including highly effective teachers and parental support and involvement—along their educational pathway.

Students' relationships with their teachers are especially important. A study conducted in the Dallas Independent School District examined a group of third graders who had roughly the same reading scores. One group was taught by three “highly effective” teachers; their test scores in reading rose from the 55th percentile to the 76th percentile by the end of sixth grade. Another group was taught by three “ineffective” teachers; their reading scores had fallen from the 57th to the 27th percentile three years later. The net effect of these highly effective teachers created a difference of nearly 50 percentiles between the two groups of students.



Another study indicates that the math achievement gap for low-performing seventh graders could be erased by graduation if students were taught for five years by highly effective teachers. Despite strong evidence to support the importance of teaching quality, districts that have the most minority students, on average, have twice as many inexperienced teachers as districts with the least amount of minority students (Figure 5). In high schools where 90 percent or more of the students are Latino, 40 percent of teachers do not have a college major in the subject they teach.

STRENGTHEN SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

In addition to quality teaching, parental support and involvement are associated with higher grades, fewer behavior problems, and a greater likelihood of going to college. In Latino communities, however, parental involvement is sometimes limited by time constraints, lack of confidence, language and other barriers. Only about 55 percent of Latino parents report they actively volunteer at their child's school, compared to 72 percent of white parents. This lower rate of participation often is thought to indicate that Latino parents do not value education. More Latino parents report helping their child with homework every day (59 percent) than white parents (48 percent). In addition, the overwhelming majority of Latino parents want their children to attend college—95 percent feel it is very important for their children to have a college education, compared to 91 percent of white parents. The following policy ideas have shown promise in strengthening supports for students.

- **Ensuring that middle and high school teachers have college level experience in the content areas they teach**
- **Considering incentives for teachers in lower performing and hard-to-staff schools and rewarding them for improvements**
- **Supporting incentives for teacher education programs at colleges and universities that recruit and retain high-performing and diverse students to become teachers**
- **Focusing on teacher professional development**
Like most other professionals, teachers can become more effective with experience and guidance.
- **Exploring policies that offer rewards or grants to schools and districts to engage parents and families**
Regular bilingual and culturally appropriate contact with parents can encourage parental involvement. Language often is a major barrier, and interpretation services for school events and information can be beneficial.
- **Encouraging initiatives to develop tutoring and mentoring programs at school and outside school**
These programs can provide adult support—or additional adult support—to students whose parents may not be involved.

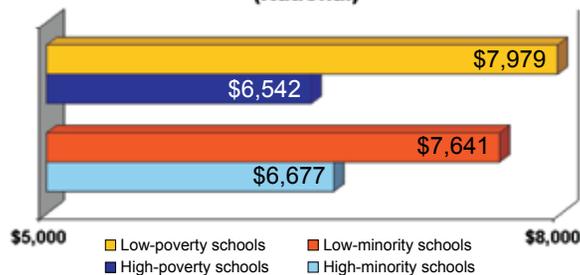


ENLACE MODEL OF SUCCESS

Change Educational Institutions

Research shows that school settings that reflect and affirm students' cultural diversity can positively influence achievement for underserved students. Only 6.2 percent of U.S. public school teachers are Latino, although Latinos represent nearly 20 percent of all students in public schools. If cultural differences and language barriers are not sensitively addressed by schools, students may experience feelings of shame, low self-esteem and, ultimately, low academic achievement. Environments that incorporate students' culture, language and community as true assets will help culturally diverse students develop a positive self-image.

Figure 6. Average Per-Pupil Funding by School District (National)



Source: Education Trust analysis of U.S. Department of Education school district revenue data for the 2002-2003 school year, available in *The Funding Gap 2005*, www.edtrust.org.

Along with cultural inclusiveness, states may want to consider policies that create more equitable financing along the P-20 continuum for low-income students. School districts with the highest percentage of students of color receive, on average, \$1,000 less per student annually than districts with few minority students. For an average-size inner-city high school with 1,500 students, this represents \$1.5 million less per year for education for students of color (Figure 6).

College costs have increased dramatically during the last several years, and need-based financial aid has decreased in many states. The average Pell grant now covers only about one-fourth of the total cost at a public four-year institution. Data show that Latino students, on average, receive less financial aid as a percentage of their financial need than do other student groups. Ninety-two percent of college financial need for white students, on average, is covered by grant financial aid, but only 45 percent of college financial need for Latino students is covered by grants, even though their average parental incomes are lower (Figure 7). (Note: White students, on average, attend more expensive colleges and have higher expected family contributions.)

Figure 7. Financial Need Compared to Grant Aid



Source: Thomas Mortenson, *College Affordability by Race/Ethnicity and Family Income 1990 to 2004*, 2006, www.postsecondary.org/last12/1271006_pg1-16.pdf.

CHANGE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Equitable funding throughout all educational levels and investments in need-based financial aid can begin to address some of the historical inequities faced by under-represented students. Creating culturally inclusive institutional environments will help welcome and engage students and families in their educational experience. The following policy options can encourage change in educational institutions and help all students achieve their educational goals.

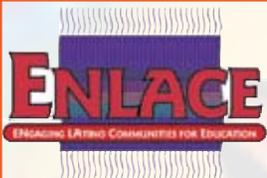
- **Encouraging training programs for teachers and school personnel in the social and cultural backgrounds and learning styles of their students**
- **Offering high school graduation credits for culturally relevant studies and courses such as Chicano Studies or Latino Literature**
- **Ensuring equity of financial support to high-need K-12 schools to meet the increased expectations**
Examine the funding formula in your state and work to provide equitable funding to address disparities in the neediest schools.
- **Considering rewards to postsecondary institutions for enrolling, retaining and matriculating under-represented students**
- **Increasing investment in need-based financial aid**
- **Exploring early aid commitments to guarantee support for low-income students who prepare for college**
These college grant or scholarship funds are guaranteed to students early in their school years (sixth to ninth grade), usually with the requirement that students qualify financially and complete a rigorous high school curriculum. Some states and communities have used early aid commitments to increase academic readiness and eliminate the financial burden of college for low-income students.
- **Encouraging institutional partnerships that support dual or concurrent enrollment, and articulation agreements between two-year and four-year colleges.**
Dual or concurrent enrollment allows a high school student to enroll in classes at a local college while in high school. Articulation agreements are contracts between two-year and four-year colleges that allow a smooth transition of credits for continuing students. These policies can save valuable time and money for students on their path to a college degree.



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Carlos Valverde is a senior policy specialist in the NCSL Education Program and is primary staff for the NCSL ENLACE project.

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