



Ensuring Latino Success in College and the Workforce

National
Conference
of
State
Legislatures

By Michelle Camacho Liu

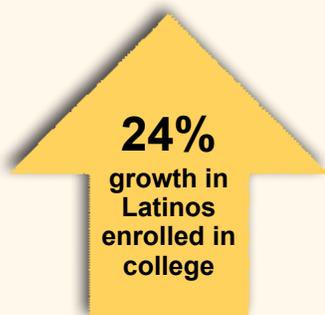
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One significant way to revitalize state economies is to increase the number of residents attending and graduating from college. Investing in higher education achievement for Latinos, our fastest growing population, is particularly important. In all states, however, the largest college completion gap is between Latino and white students. As policymakers work on how to improve the educational success of Latinos and strengthen the workforce, there are some issues to consider.

Latinos are and will be a large and growing segment of the student population and workforce

Latinos make up the largest and fastest growing minority group in the nation. According to the 2010 Census, 50.5 million Americans identify as Latinos, representing more than 16 percent of the U.S. population. In seven states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas—they represent more than 20 percent of the population, and their numbers are growing in every state.

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Latino Americans

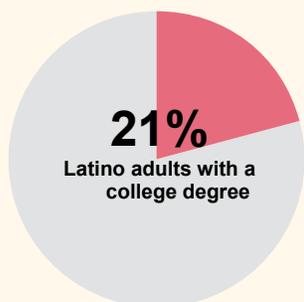


During the last decade, the Latino population fueled more than half the total U.S. population growth. Nine states, many concentrated in the South, saw their Latino population more than double during this time. Much of the growth is concentrated in the school-age population, where one in four children under age 18 is Latino.

This shift in population is already being seen on college campuses. The number of Latinos attending college grew by a record 24 percent in one year (2009–2010).¹ This brought the total number of Latinos enrolled in college to its highest level ever, 1.8 million in 2010. The Department of Education reports that the vast majority (88 percent) of Latino undergraduate students are U.S. citizens, 11 percent are resident aliens, and less than 2 percent are undocumented.

Latino education gaps are persistent but not necessarily permanent

Strategies to improve not only access to college but also success in graduating with a certificate or degree benefit all students, but particularly Latino students, who traditionally have fallen behind other populations in college enrollment and completion rates. Of high-school graduates, 59 percent of Latino students immediately enroll in college, compared with 71 percent of white students.² In addition, only 36 percent of first-time, full-time Latino students earn a degree within six years, compared with 49 percent of whites.

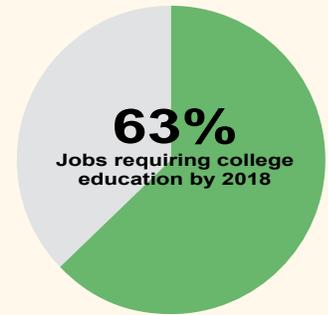


Latino college completion is on the rise and in the past decade the number of Latinos with bachelor's degrees or higher increased 80 percent.³ Nationally, 21 percent of Latino adults hold a two-year degree or higher. Compared with 44 percent of whites and 30 percent of African Americans, however, Latinos still have the lowest educational attainment of any U.S. population group.⁴ This gap between the educational attainment of Latinos and whites is consistent across all states, and it is particularly noticeable in states with large Latino populations. With the rate the Latino population is growing, closing this gap is key to meeting national college completion goals.

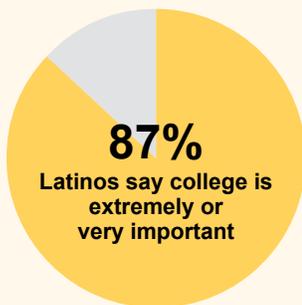
Higher education produces a positive return on investment for states

By 2018, 63 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary degree or certificate. At the current rate of college completion, the nation will be short by 3 million degrees.⁵ An increase in the number of jobs requiring a college degree ultimately benefits state economies. These high-skilled and high-paying jobs provide higher tax revenues for states. College graduates pay more income and sales taxes and depend less on social service programs such as food stamps and Medicaid.

Policymakers can help ensure that Latinos have the opportunity and preparation to obtain these high-demand, high-paying jobs. With the number of Latinos growing, improving their college completion rates will enable them to earn higher wages, improve their living standards and increase their financial contribution to state economies.

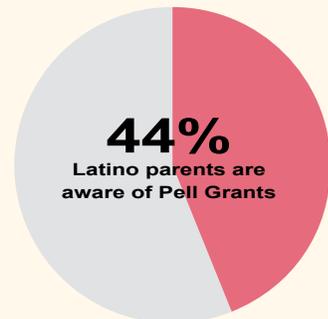


Challenges for Latino students and families persist



Latino students and families value education;⁶ however, they often lack the experience, information and resources about how to apply to college, receive financial aid, succeed in getting a degree and find the support services they need along the way. Engaging these families in the college process is imperative. About 50 percent of Latinos who enroll in college are the first in their families to do so,⁷ and one-third of Latino undergraduates continue to live at home while they attend college.⁸

Finding ways to pay for college and having flexibility in attending classes are of particular concern for Latino students. Because Latino students are more likely to come from low-income families, strategies that provide financial support for these students to attend and remain in college are critical. Latino students also are less likely than other students to assume loans, more likely to attend part-time, and more likely to work part- or full-time to help pay for college.⁹ A recent survey found that only 44 percent of Latino parents were aware of the federal Pell Grant program, compared with 81 percent of white parents and 82 percent of African-American parents.¹⁰



Strategies That Work

1 Inform all students and families about financial aid options, expand college preparation programs in high schools and support services in colleges

Effective outreach and counseling that provide relevant, targeted information about applying to college along with federal, state and institutional financial aid options can help families better understand how they can afford college. Counselors in secondary schools dedicated to college and career planning, particularly in low-income districts, are important resources for helping students and their families consider and prepare for options after high school graduation. In addition, when college support services—such as mentoring, cohort programs, internships, tutoring and advisement—are available to them, low-income and first-generation students are more likely to remain in school and complete a degree.¹¹



Legislators can support these outreach and counseling efforts by tapping into the resources offered by federal programs and local or national initiatives. This can be done by ensuring that federal grant money for college preparation in middle and high school and student services in college are being fully used. Legislators also can determine whether local or national foundations provide counseling and college preparation services in their community, learn what types of programs they offer (in-school counselors, financial aid workshops, web or media campaigns), and support such efforts by encouraging collaboration between the foundations and state departments of education. In addition, legislators can promote these initiatives through legislative resolutions, public service announcements and other media outlets.

2 Preserve need-based financial aid programs and sustain investments in work-study programs

Need-based grants, in particular, increase college access for underrepresented students¹² and provide an alternative to loans, which must be repaid. Work-study programs also attract and can help Latino students who must work to support themselves through college. These programs, which allow students to work on campus, increase awareness of support services, inspire more faculty interaction, enhance college engagement, and encourage graduation.¹³ Policymakers can supplement state funding for need-based aid and work study programs by supporting matching grants provided by federal programs, private donors and foundations.

3 Learn from the successes of Hispanic-serving institutions, particularly in family engagement

A large portion of Latinos are enrolled in Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), which have undergraduate enrollments of at least 25 percent Latino students. During the 2009-10 school year, 54 percent of all Latino college students were enrolled in such institutions.¹⁴ These institutions award a significant proportion of all Latino degrees and provide excellent examples of successful programs, particularly in involving families in their children's academic success. They connect with Latino families by targeting parents in the recruitment process and having parent-specific orientations to provide information about the family's role in supporting their student through graduation. Legislators can get to know these institutions by visiting with leaders and faculty, and by understanding not only the demographics of the students served, but also the retention and graduation rates. They can support the success and growth of HSIs by considering funding formulas that reward institutions for successfully graduating large numbers of underrepresented students and through capacity-building projects.

4 Recognize that community colleges are the entry point for many Latino students

Community colleges provide an attractive option for students who want easily accessible, low-cost, flexible options close to home. In 2009, more than half of Latino students were enrolled in a community or two-year college.¹⁵ Because community colleges generally have open admission policies, they offer a viable option for any Latino student who wants to attend college. Lawmakers can ensure that appropriate academic and/or financial supports are in place to help these institutions increase Latino students' achievement and success. This can be done by encouraging schools to set degree attainment goals, making retention and success a priority, and considering funding incentives to reward schools for enrolling and graduating underrepresented students. In establishing workforce development initiatives, legislators can encourage collaboration between community colleges and local businesses to ensure that community colleges are responsive to local workforce needs and to encourage the businesses that may hire these graduates to provide financial support through grants and scholarships.



5 Simplify transfer and articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year universities

For many Latinos, postsecondary experience begins and ends at community college. Almost half of Latino students do not transfer to a four-year college, thus limiting future earning potential.¹⁶ Some state lawmakers have simplified the transfer process by encouraging institutions to create a statewide course numbering system and guaranteeing admission to a four-year college as a junior for any student who completes an associate degree at a community college. Legislators also can support transfer by tracking transfer rates of community colleges and considering funding incentives to reward them for successful transfers. In addition, they can provide incentives for four-year universities by allowing them to include transfer students in their graduation rates.

Resources

- NCSL: Investing in Higher Education for Latinos
- NCSL: The Path to a Degree
- Excelencia in Education
- White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics
- The College Board: Latino State Policy Guide
- Lumina Foundation: Latino Success Project

Notes

1. Richard Fry, *Hispanic College Enrollment Spikes, Narrowing Gaps with Other Groups* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).
2. U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data (CCD), “NCES Common Core Data State Dropout and Completion Data File,” School Year 2008-2009, Version 1a, (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2011).
3. Deborah Santiago and Megan Soliz, *Finding Your Workforce: The Top 25 Institutions Graduation Latinos*, (Washington, D.C.: Excelencia in Education, 2012).
4. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010.
5. Tony Carnevale, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018* (Washington, D.C.: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010).
6. Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Trevor Tompson, “87% of Hispanics value higher education; 13% have college degree,” *The Associated Press*, July 30, 2010.
7. U.S. Department of Education, *Web Tables-Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2007-2008* (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2010), Table 3.11.
8. Deborah Santiago, “All Together: The Role of Latino Families in Higher Education,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 25, 2011.
9. Deborah Santiago, *Roadmap for Ensuring America’s Future by Increasing Latino College Completion* (Washington, D.C.: Excelencia in Education, 2011).
10. College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, *Cracking the Student Aid Code: Parent and Student Perspectives on Paying for College* (New York: The College Board, 2010).
11. National Conference of State Legislatures, *The Path to a Degree: A Legislator’s Guide to College Access and Success* (Denver, Colo.: NCSL, 2009).
12. Ibid.
13. Santiago, *Roadmap for Ensuring America’s Future by Increasing Latino College Completion*.
14. Excelencia in Education, *Hispanic-Serving Institutions: 2009-10 Factsheet*. (Washington, D.C.: Excelencia in Education, 2011).
15. U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2009, Enrollment component (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2011).
16. College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, *The College Completion Agenda State Policy Guide: The Latino Edition* (New York: The College Board, 2011).

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