



Futures At Risk:

The Story of Latino Student Achievement in California, 2010

The educational success of Latino students is critical to the prosperity and vitality of California and the nation. The state has more than three million Latino students in its classrooms, accounting for roughly half of all the children in our public schools.

Put in the larger national context, there are more Latino students in California than the total student population in each of the 48 other states. By 2020, Latinos are projected to be California's majority population.

Yet California's education system has not served Latino students well—particularly those from low-income families. Latinos are more likely than their white and more affluent peers to receive less of everything we know matters most in education—from highly effective teachers to a rigorous curriculum. Latino students are disproportionately taught by out-of-field teachers,¹ and a culture of low expectations and dismal performance often plague the schools they attend.

As a result, three-quarters of the students in the state's lowest 30 percent of schools are Latino. And only 15 percent of Latino students attend the top 30 percent of California schools. It is not surprising, then, that large and persistent gaps exist between Latino students and their white peers on every measurable benchmark of learning and achievement. From the earliest grades, Latino students struggle to achieve proficiency in English and math. By middle and high school, these performance levels tend to decline. Even more disheartening, the achievement gaps between white and Latino students have remained largely unchanged over the last decade.

The outcomes are unconscionable. Table 1 illustrates that for every 100 Latino students who enter a ninth-grade classroom in California, 61 leave high school with a diploma in hand. Of these students, only 23 are eligible to apply to the

University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) systems. These alarming data illustrate how, year after year, California's public education system fails to prepare a huge proportion of our Latino students for success in elementary and secondary education, much less college or a career.

This report tracks the most recent data on Latino achievement in California and examines performance trends over the past eight years (2003-10). We shine a spotlight on the opportunity gaps that exist between Latino students and their peers. Our analysis highlights the state's largest moderate-to-high-poverty school districts that have demonstrated gains in Latino achievement. The report also reveals districts with the lowest rates of Latino achievement and smallest performance gains. We conclude by recommending a series of reforms to address Latino achievement and opportunity gaps and improve the academic outcomes of our state's Latino students.

Table 1: Latino Student Performance by the Numbers

- 49 percent of Latino children attend preschool, compared with 65 percent of white children.
- 42 percent of Latino second-graders are proficient in English Language Arts.
- 40 percent of Latino eighth-graders are proficient in English Language Arts.
- 21 percent of Latino middle and high school students are proficient in Algebra I.
- 61 percent of Latino students graduate from high school in four years.
- 23 percent of these Latino graduates complete high school with the coursework needed for admission to the University of California or California State University—yet many of those students will not have the test scores and grades necessary to be truly eligible for admission.
- 14 percent of Latino public high school graduates immediately enroll in a four-year public university in California.

LEFT BEHIND AT THE STARTING GATE

Elementary Performance

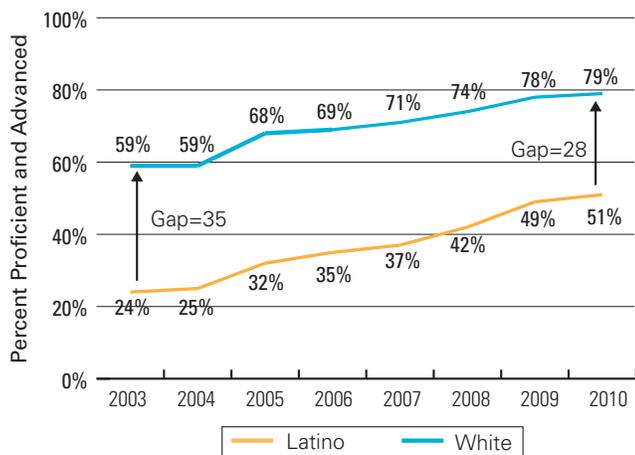
Research shows that enrollment in a high-quality preschool can have a lasting impact on student achievement in the early elementary grades. Yet Latino children are less likely to attend preschool than their white peers (49 percent compared with 65 percent).

By second grade, the earliest tested grade, these disadvantages take their toll. Only 42 percent of Latino second-graders score proficient or higher in English, compared with 68 percent of white students. In mathematics, 53 percent of Latino second-graders achieve grade-level proficiency, compared with 76 percent of their white peers.

As Latino students move through the elementary grades, achievement gaps stubbornly persist. In fourth-grade English, 51 percent of Latino students achieve proficiency, compared with 79 percent of white students. In fourth-grade mathematics, 79 percent of white students achieve proficiency, though only 60 percent of Latino students do so.

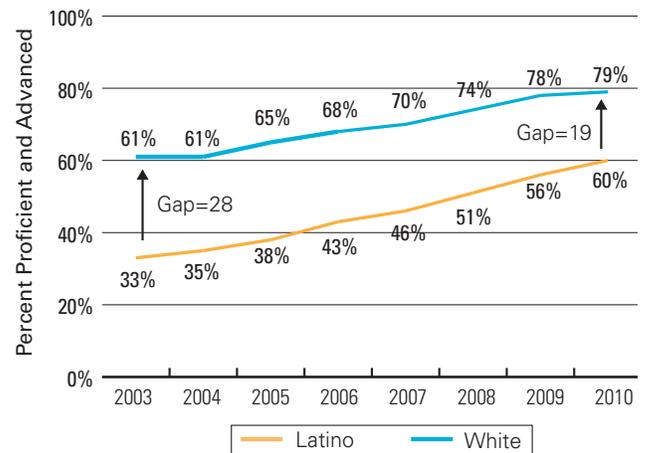
Despite these unacceptably low levels of achievement and significant achievement gaps, some positive trends are evident. From 2003-10, proficiency rates for fourth-grade Latino students improved in both English and math at a faster rate than for their white peers. The result: Fourth-grade achievement gaps have narrowed by seven percentage points in English and nine percentage points in math over this eight-year period (see Figures 1 and 2). At this rate of improvement, however, it would take more than 20 years to eliminate these gaps.

Figure 1: Performance Trends Among Latino and White Students on the Fourth-Grade English Language Arts CST, 2003-10



Source: California Department of Education, 2003-10.

Figure 2: Performance Trends Among Latino and White Students on the Fourth-Grade Mathematics CST, 2003-10



Source: California Department of Education, 2003-10.

District Performance

Student performance varies widely among districts. Several of California's largest districts substantially raised Latino achievement from 2003-10.² At Manteca Unified in San Joaquin County, fourth-grade English proficiency rates for Latino students improved by 46 percentage points, far surpassing the statewide gain of 27 points. Meanwhile, Stockton Unified, also in San Joaquin County, demonstrated much smaller gains in both English and math (see Table 2).

In some districts, fewer than half of Latino students reached grade-level proficiency in English and math. In other districts, proficiency rates in math were as high as 75 percent, approaching the state average for white students (see Table 3). Educators and policymakers should pay close attention to the strategies of these more successful districts and aim for similar growth and success in Latino student performance in other districts across the state.

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL Secondary School Performance

Among all racial and ethnic groups in California, achievement slips as students advance through the grades. For Latino students, these declines are precipitous. By eighth grade, Latino proficiency rates in English Language Arts have dropped to 40 percent. By eleventh grade, these rates drop even further, with only 30 percent of all Latino students reaching proficiency in English. Tellingly, only one Latino eleventh-grader attains proficiency for every two white students who do so.

At the middle and high school levels, participation in math courses and proficiency rates are abysmal. Only 57 percent of Latino eighth-graders took Algebra I, the "gatekeeper" course

Table 2: Top and Bottom Performers: Gains in CST Scores Among Latino Fourth-Graders in California's Largest Unified School Districts, 2003-10

		District	Change in Proficiency Among Latino Students (Percentage Point Increase)
English Language Arts	Top-Gaining Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	+46
		Desert Sands Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>)	+39
		Fontana Unified (<i>San Bernardino County</i>) Oakland Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>)	+37
	Lowest Gaining Districts	Fairfield-Suisun Unified (<i>Solano County</i>)	+19
		Hayward Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>)	+17
		Stockton Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	+16
Math	Top-Gaining Districts	Oakland Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>)	+44
		Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	+42
		Compton Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	+41
	Lowest Gaining Districts	Elk Grove Unified (<i>Sacramento County</i>)	+18
		Hayward Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>) Pomona Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	
		Riverside Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>)	+17
		Stockton Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	+12

Note: Districts only included in analysis if 2008-09 enrollment was \geq 5 percent Latino and if 2008-09 free or reduced-price lunch rates \geq 40 percent.
Source: California Department of Education, 2003-10.

Table 3: Top and Bottom Performers: Overall CST Proficiency Rates for Latino Fourth-Graders in California's Largest Unified School Districts, 2010

		District	Percentage of Latino Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced
English Language Arts	Top-Performing Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	69%
		Glendale Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	62%
		Desert Sands Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>)	61%
	Lowest Performing Districts	West Contra Costa (<i>Contra Costa County</i>)	42%
		Hayward Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>) Stockton Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	36%
Math	Top-Performing Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	75%
		Hacienda La Puente Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	71%
		Garden Grove Unified (<i>Orange County</i>)	
		Long Beach Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	70%
	Lowest Performing Districts	West Contra Costa (<i>Contra Costa County</i>)	51%
		Visalia Unified (<i>Tulare County</i>)	49%
		San Francisco Unified (<i>San Francisco County</i>) Hayward Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>) Stockton Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	47%

Note: Districts only included in analysis if 2008-09 enrollment was \geq 5 percent Latino and if 2008-09 free or reduced-price lunch rates \geq 40 percent.
Source: California Department of Education, 2010.

Table 4: CST Scores and Gaps for Elementary and Secondary Latino Students, 2010

	Grade	Latino Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced	White Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced	Achievement Gap Between Latino and White Students (Percentage Points)
English Language Arts	2	42%	68%	26
	4	51%	79%	28
	8	40%	71%	31
	11	30%	58%	28
Math	2	53%	76%	23
	4	60%	79%	19
	Algebra I EOC	21%	42%	21
	Algebra II EOC	20%	37%	17

Note: EOC stands for "end of course."
Source: California Department of Education, 2010.

to the higher level math classes required for admission to the UC and CSU systems. Of those students, only 35 percent achieved proficiency. Latino students who take Algebra I after eighth grade fare worse; just one of every five Latino students who took Algebra I in high school achieved proficiency. This rate is substantially lower than the 42 percent passing rate posted by their white peers.

By the eleventh grade, only 31 percent of Latino students have taken Algebra II—the higher level math course required for UC/CSU eligibility.³ Just 20 percent of Latino middle and high school students taking Algebra II score at the proficient level, compared with 37 percent of white students (see Table 4).

District Performance

Across California, some districts have dramatically improved proficiency rates among Latino middle and high school students, yet other districts have made only incremental progress. From 2003-10, Manteca Unified increased proficiency rates in eighth-grade English by 40 percentage points. By contrast,

San Jose Unified (Santa Clara County) and West Contra Costa Unified (Contra Costa County) boosted these rates by a mere 15 percentage points (see Table 5).

Overall, English proficiency rates for Latino eighth-graders also vary considerably from one large school district to another. For example, English proficiency rates of 57 percent for Latino students in Manteca Unified and Hacienda La Puente Unified (Los Angeles County) are more than twice those of West Contra Costa's 26 percent. Even so, proficiency rates for these "high performing" districts remain low: Only slightly more than half of Latino students reach proficiency (see Table 6).

The proficiency rates for Latino students in Algebra I were dismal in 2010. Large districts posted appallingly low passing rates across the board: In West Contra Costa Unified, only 7 percent of Latino students achieved proficiency. And in the "highest performing" district, Manteca Unified, slightly more than one-third of students scored proficient or above (see Table 7).

Table 5: Top and Bottom Performers: Gains in Eighth-Grade Latino CST Scores in California's Largest Unified School Districts, 2003-10

	District	Change in Proficiency Among Latino Students (Percentage Point Increase)	
English Language Arts	Top-Gaining Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	+40
		Hacienda La Puente Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	+39
		Corona-Norco Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>)	+33
	Lowest Gaining Districts	Fairfield-Suisun Unified (<i>Solano County</i>)	+17
		Compton Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	+16
		San Jose Unified (<i>Santa Clara County</i>)	+15
	West Contra Costa Unified (<i>Contra Costa County</i>)	+15	

Note: Districts only included in analysis if 2008-09 enrollment was ≥ 5 percent Latino and if 2008-09 free or reduced-price lunch rates ≥ 40 percent.
Source: California Department of Education, 2003-10.

Table 6: Top and Bottom Performers: Overall CST Proficiency Rates for Latino Eighth-Graders in California's Largest Unified School Districts, 2010

		District	Percentage of Latino Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced
English Language Arts	Top-Performing Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	57%
		Hacienda La Puente Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	
		Glendale Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	51%
		Corona-Norco Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>) Downey Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	50%
	Lowest Performing Districts	Compton Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	28%
		Oakland Unified (<i>Alameda County</i>)	27%
		West Contra Costa Unified (<i>Contra Costa County</i>)	26%

Note: Districts only included in analysis if 2008-09 enrollment was ≥ 5 percent Latino and if 2008-09 free or reduced-price lunch rates ≥ 40 percent. Source: California Department of Education, 2010.

Table 7: Top and Bottom Performers: Overall Proficiency Rates for Latino Students in End-of-Course Algebra I CST in California's Largest Unified School Districts, 2010

		District	Percentage of Latino Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced
End-of-Course Algebra I	Top-Performing Districts	Manteca Unified (<i>San Joaquin County</i>)	37%
		Hacienda La Puente Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	31%
		Elk Grove Unified (<i>Sacramento County</i>)	
		Visalia Unified (<i>Tulare County</i>)	30%
		Glendale Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>) Garden Grove Unified (<i>Orange County</i>)	
	Lowest Performing Districts	Corona-Norco Unified (<i>Riverside County</i>)	13%
		Pomona Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	
		Compton Unified (<i>Los Angeles County</i>)	12%
		West Contra Costa Unified (<i>Contra Costa County</i>)	7%

Note: Districts only included in analysis if 2008-09 enrollment was ≥ 5 percent Latino and if 2008-09 free or reduced-price lunch rates ≥ 40 percent. Source: California Department of Education, 2010.

These trends in secondary English and mathematics proficiency rates demonstrate that Latino students face disparate outcomes based on the district in which they attend school, even when compared with similar districts with moderate-to-high levels of poverty.

Although several factors may influence these differences, the gaps in opportunity nevertheless are unacceptable. Latino students face insurmountable barriers to college eligibility, matriculation, and postsecondary success if they lack access to higher level mathematics courses or do not achieve proficiency in secondary English and math.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

For Latino students who often experience years of poor instruction, scarce educational resources, and a climate of failure and low expectations, a high school diploma or college degree may appear out of reach. These experiences may lead them to disengage or even leave school. Latino students drop out of high school at disproportionately higher rates than their white peers. In fact, just 61 percent of Latinos graduated from California high schools in 2008, compared with 80 percent of white students. In the 2007-08 school year, more than 43,000 Latino students (representing 55 percent of all high school dropouts) left high school without a diploma.

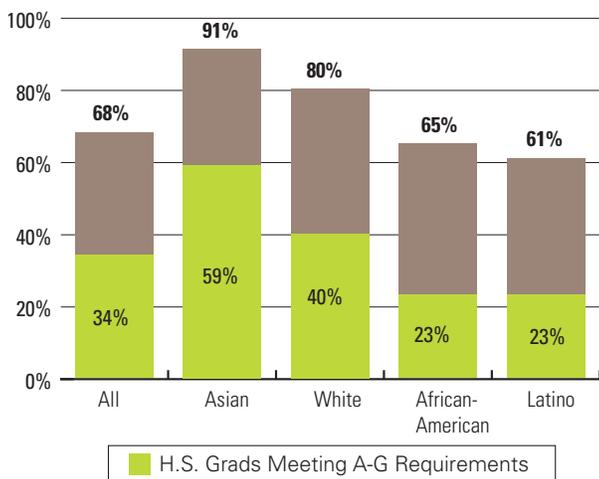
Even more staggering: Most Latino students who do make it to graduation are unprepared for postsecondary education or a career. In 2008, only 23 percent of Latino high school graduates completed the A-G coursework required for admission to the UC and CSU systems. This is just half the rate of their white peers (see Figure 3). The more than 43,000 Latino dropouts in 2008, significantly outnumbered the 32,000 who were eligible to apply to a UC or CSU institution.

Those Latino students who have completed the A-G coursework may not necessarily be equipped for college-level work. California’s voluntary Early Assessment Program (EAP) measures eleventh-graders’ preparation for college-level coursework.⁴ Results indicate that few Latino students have the requisite skills to succeed in college-level English and math. Just 7 percent of Latino eleventh-graders performed at the “college ready” level on the English portion of the EAP, and only 4 percent were “college ready” in mathematics (see Figure 4).

Obviously, these gaps in achievement and readiness limit their college and career options. In 2008, only 14 percent of Latino public high school graduates enrolled in a UC or CSU as first-time freshmen, which made them vastly under-represented on these campuses. Latino students make up 16 percent of UC undergraduate enrollment and 25 percent of CSU undergraduate enrollment—even though they represent 44 percent of the California population ages 18-24. Of course, college admission and enrollment do not guarantee success. Six-year graduation rates for Latino first-time freshmen remain appallingly low, ranging from 74 percent in the UC system to 42 percent in the CSU system. (These figures require a caveat: Not all Latino CSU and UC students are from public high schools in California, so the graduation rate for our state’s Latino students may vary.)

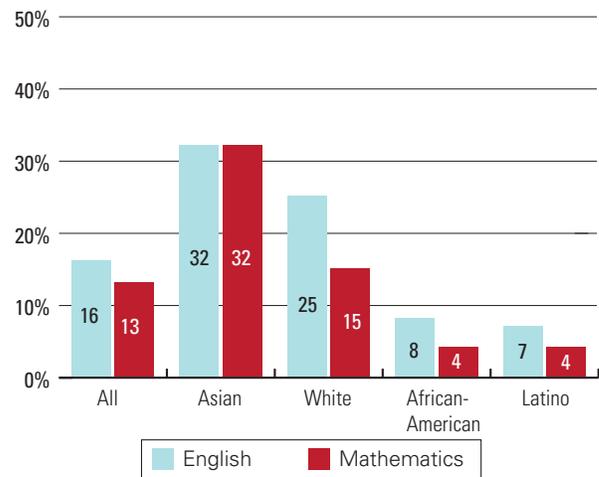
All of these trends point to a larger problem: The educational pipeline is leaking. Too few Latino students are prepared for college, and too few enroll in California’s four-year universities. Of those who do, significant numbers fail to earn bachelor’s degrees. Given the impact of college attendance and graduation on long-term income and job prospects, these data

Figure 3: High School Graduation Rates by Ethnicity, 2007-08



Source: California Department of Education, 2009; graduation rates calculated using Average Freshmen Graduation Rate (AFGR) Raising the Roof data tool.

Figure 4: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Deemed “Ready for College” on California Early Assessment Program (EAP) English and Math Exams, 2009



Source: California Early Assessment Program, 2009.

demonstrate a large-scale denial of educational and economic opportunity for our state’s Latino students.

ENGLISH LEARNERS FACE EXTRA CHALLENGES

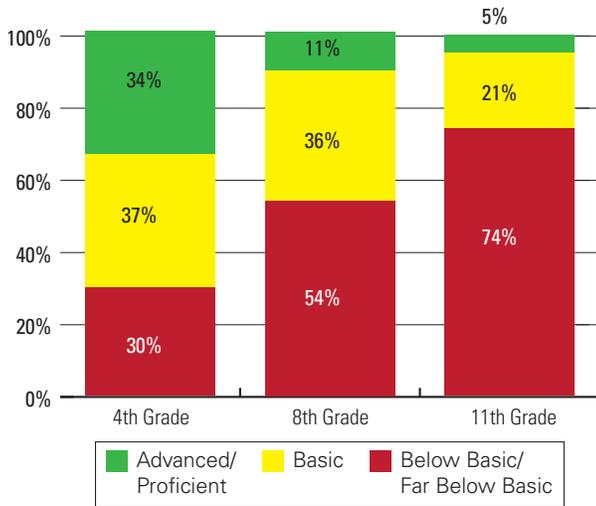
In 2009, according to our estimate, 42 percent of California’s three million Latino students were classified as English learners (ELs).⁵ Meanwhile, Spanish speakers make up the vast majority—85 percent—of the state’s EL population. These students face a dual challenge: They must learn English while simultaneously reaching grade-level proficiency in core academic areas.

In fourth-grade English Language Arts, only one-third of ELs achieved proficiency, and this rate drops dramatically in the secondary grades. In 2010, only 11 percent of EL eighth-graders and 5 percent of EL eleventh-graders were proficient in English Language Arts. Meanwhile, an astounding 74 percent of EL students scored at the Below Basic or Far Below Basic levels in eleventh-grade English (see Figure 5).

The vast majority of our state’s English learners enter school in kindergarten and the early elementary years. In fact, 61 percent of those taking the California English Language Development Test for the first time did so in kindergarten. ELs in high school, therefore, are most likely to be those who have moved through the grades without meeting the district-specified academic criteria needed to be “reclassified” as fluent-English-proficient.⁶

The dramatically declining achievement results in the upper grades suggest that the longer students remain classified as English learners, the worse they fare. By contrast, students who started as ELs and eventually were reclassified as English-proficient perform significantly higher by the end of high

Figure 5: Proficiency Rates Among California's English Learners on Fourth, Eighth, and Eleventh Grade English Language Arts CST, 2010



Source: California Department of Education, 2010.

school. For example, 44 percent of reclassified fluent-English-proficient eleventh-graders achieved grade-level English standards, compared with only 5 percent of ELs.

Reclassification makes a critical difference for English learners. Although more ELs were reclassified as fluent in English in 2008-09 than in the previous year (168,398 compared with 150,573), far too many long-term English learners enter middle school and high school with inadequate English skills. As a result, they are more likely to struggle academically and face limited college and career choices.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As the largest student ethnic group in California, Latinos constitute roughly half of the school-age population. Indeed, the state's future prosperity depends upon the success of today's Latino students. Yet California has failed to address the pervasive opportunity and achievement gaps that plague them. To reverse current trends, the following steps are essential:

- Learn from success, and hold districts accountable for failure.** Our state does a poor job leveraging the success of top-performing districts and holding the lowest performers accountable for failure. Research into the practices of districts successfully serving Latino students should inform improvement efforts in other districts. Across the state, high-poverty districts with significant Latino populations are producing high achievement. The outcomes in these districts provide benchmarks that should drive improvement goals for lower achieving districts. When low performance persists, the state should forcefully intervene.

- Provide universal high-quality preschool.** Research shows that children attending high-quality preschool programs one or two years before they enter kindergarten are more ready for school and continue to show improved academic achievement once they enter. We must ensure that Latino students arrive in kindergarten prepared for success by providing universal access to preschool.
- Identify and assign the most effective teachers to the highest need students, and remove ineffective teachers.** More than any other in-school factor, the quality of the classroom teacher determines student success. We must create systems that allow us to evaluate teacher effectiveness, and such evaluations must include an assessment of each teacher's impact on student achievement. The state should target incentive funds for districts to attract the most effective teachers to work in high-need schools, and the state and local districts must dismantle barriers to the speedy removal of persistently ineffective teachers.
- Protect high-poverty schools with large percentages of Latino students from staff churn.** School districts should not be able to enter into any agreements (such as seniority-based teacher assignments) that interfere with equitable access to highly effective teachers, result in high rates of staff turnover in high-need schools, or both.
- Guarantee access to college and career-ready coursework, and give students the supports they need to succeed.** Latino students must have equitable access to Algebra I and Algebra II. And districts must ensure that these students have the instructional supports to succeed in regular coursework and credit-recovery opportunities such as online courses, summer school, and independent study so that students who fail a course do not have to retake courses and fall further behind. Districts also must ensure that Latino students have equitable access to A-G courses taught by effective teachers so that more Latino students are eligible for UC or CSU admission.
- Reform the reclassification process for ELs: California should set a clear standard for reclassifying English learners.** Currently, state law requires school districts to develop their own reclassification policies based on multiple criteria (such as a language-proficiency assessment, teacher evaluation, parental evaluation, and curriculum mastery). As a result, reclassification rates and processes vary widely even within districts and schools. The state must ensure that all ELs receive high-quality instruction and academic support so students can become proficient in English as early as possible.

NOTES

- ¹ "The Status of the Teaching Profession, 2009." The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, www.cftl.org/documents/2009/TCFSummaryFact09.pdf.
- ² For this analysis, we concentrated on California's largest unified school districts with poverty rates of 40 percent or higher (n=35).
- ³ The Algebra I and Algebra II enrollment statistics were calculated using the most recent statewide enrollment data (2008-09).
- ⁴ In 2009, 80 percent of Latino juniors elected to take the English portion of this exam, and 77 percent chose to take the math section (compared with 82 percent and 76 percent of their white peers).
- ⁵ The California Department of Education does not report the number of Latino students classified as ELs; our estimate was calculated by dividing the number of Spanish-speaking ELs by the overall Latino population. This estimate assumes that native-Spanish-speaking EL students are Latino and does not account for Latino ELs who may speak a language other than English or Spanish.
- ⁶ Reclassified fluent-English-proficient (RFEP): Students are reclassified according to multiple criteria, including the California English Language Development Test results, California Standards Test results in English, teacher evaluations, and parent consultations. Students being reclassified must have English-language proficiency comparable with that of average native-English speakers (CDE, 2009).

Additional Information about Latino Student Achievement

- "California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and their Schools." A Special Report by The Education Trust–West, 2005.
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- "The Grades Are In—2008: Is California Higher Education Measuring Up?" by Colleen Moore and Nancy Shulock. Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at California State University, Sacramento; February 2009.

Data Sources

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- California Department of Education, Ed-Data. www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/welcome.asp.
- California Postsecondary Education Commission, Ethnicity Snapshots. www.cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/EthSnapshotMenu.asp.
- California State University, Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE). www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde/index.shtml#ftf.
- California State University, Early Assessment Program (EAP). <http://eap2009.ets.org>.
- College Results Online, An Education Trust Data Tool. www.collegeresults.org.
- Raising the Roof, An ETW Education Data Tool. <http://rtr.edtrustwest.org>.
- University of California, Office of the President, StatFinder. <http://statfinder.ucop.edu/reports/schoolreports/default.aspx>.



The Education Trust–West

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST–WEST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.