

Latino Achievement in California

Fifty years ago, *Brown v. the Board of Education* made several promises to our nation's young people. One was that schools could not be segregated by race. Another was that our nation's public schools would make education available to all groups of students on equal terms. California's public schools teach more Latino children than any other subgroup of students. But do they live up to the spirit of *Brown* in teaching those students? Looking at the data, tragically, we see a very unequal system for Latino students in California. And they are too often denied equal or equitable access to the high-quality teachers, rigorous classes and resources that would help them achieve. This report shows where California is falling short for its Latino youth, highlights some places that are making great gains, and shows us why it doesn't have to be this way.

How far have we come?

Since 1992, reading and math achievement among California's Latino students has climbed steadily. But, unfortunately, the

closed significantly (National Assessment of Education Progress trend analysis).

Where are we now?

Despite some progress in raising overall achievement, though, far too few Latino students read or do math at proficient levels. A mere 24% of California's Latino 4th graders reach proficient or above on our English/language arts standards. A heartbreaking 36% have not been taught even to the basic level.

The magnitude and impact for these children is even more troubling when we consider what the numbers mean in terms of skills:

Reading: Only 33% of California's Latino 4th graders can grasp the message of a storybook.

Math: Only 34% of California's Latino 8th graders can determine the correct change form a simple purchase, or solve a basic percentage problem. (NAEP 2003).

California's Latino students haven't just been left behind—they've been left years behind. As early as 4th grade, Latino students are reading and doing math two years behind

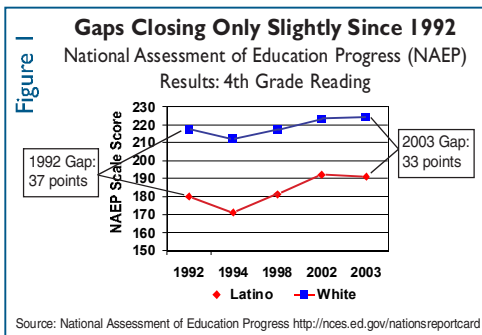
their White peers (CAT/6). By middle school, they are three years behind. And by the time they reach the end of high school, California's young Latinos read and do math at the same levels as White middle-schoolers, four years behind their peers.

We've heard some people blame these gaps on the large numbers of Latino students in California who don't yet speak English fluently—a full 48% of our Latino young people. But even when you take language out of the equation, our Latino students are trailing years of learning behind. For example, our Latino 4th graders who are fluent in English score almost two years worth of learning behind White Californians on national tests. The same holds true in math.

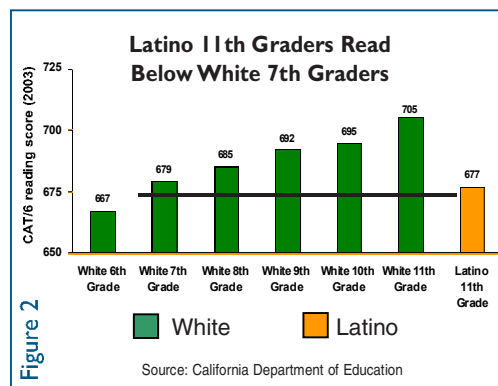
There is some good news for the 48% of our Latino population who don't speak English. Last year, these students made double digit gains in 4th grade reading and math. But, overall, California isn't doing so well by its ELL Latinos. Our Latino ELL students score among the lowest in the nation compared with Latino ELL students from other states—19th out of 26 states reporting.

What about high-school graduation?

If something doesn't change, far too many Latino students are going to be denied a diploma when the punitive measures of the California High School Exit Exam kick in two years from now. Students in the class of 2006 will not receive a high-school diploma unless they pass both the math and



broad gaps that continue to divide the performance of Latino students in California from that of White Californians have not



English/language arts sections of the high-school exit exam. But just last year, only 59% of Latino 10th graders passed the English/language arts section, and only 34% passed the math section.

Even without the requirement to pass CAHSEE, though, too many Latino Californians are not making it to high-school graduation.

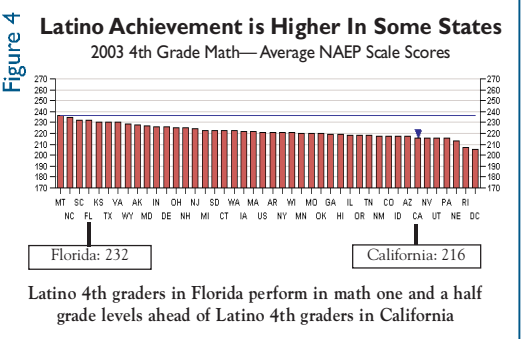
Drop out rates for Latinos in California are dramatic, and are often underreported by official sources. We've used a more accurate method here. Comparing the number of Latinos who started in 9th grade to the number who graduate four years later, we find that about 44% of our Latino youngsters drop out of high school before graduation day.

There are even entire states where Latino students excel. For example, Latino 4th graders in Florida perform in math one and a half grade levels ahead of Latino 4th graders in California.

they tell us to protect the students who need the most help in our system.

Successful systems provide all students with a challenging curriculum aligned with standards

New standards and assessments won't make much of a difference if they are not accompanied by a rigorous curriculum lined up with those standards. This is especially important in high school, where a rigorous core curriculum is necessary to prepare a young person for most career paths and for admission to and success in college. Yet in too many cases some students are taught a rich and challenging subject matter while others are relegated to a low-level curriculum—one better aligned with assembly-line jobs that are disappearing than with today's job market or college-entry requirements.



And while some of the differences between California and other states may be due to the high number of English Language Learners in California, even among non-English Language Learner Latino students, California scores 24th out of 39 states nationally with a significant population of non-English Learner Latinos.

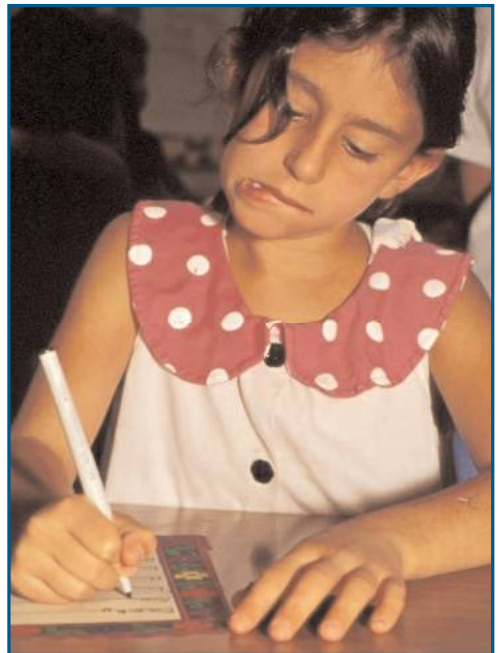
What do we know about the places that are improving results?

Successful systems have clear goals: the role of standards

Clear standards for what students should learn at each grade level are a critical tool for solving the inequities in California education. Standards are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents and students themselves—to what knowledge and skills are critical for students to master. Moreover, standards represent a contract between schools and their communities that reaching these standards is the expectation for all students.

Experts consider California's standards to be some of the best in the nation. When they were crafted, California's policy leaders promised, loudly and clearly, that all children—not just some groups—would learn to their high levels.

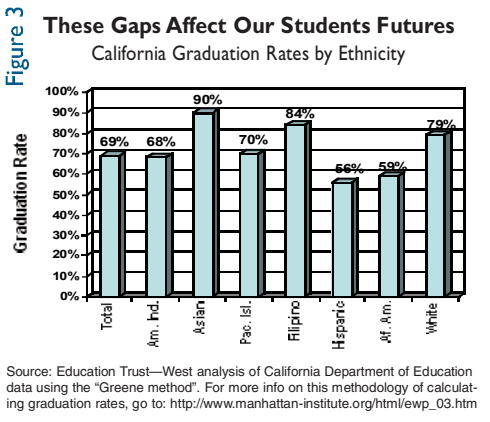
But today our assessments show us that too few Latino students are taught to these levels. These assessments are crucial if we are to measure whether we're keeping our promise to young Latinos. No, assessments aren't perfect, but complaining about where they fall short ignores that they show us some very real deficits in our students' skills. Assessments are our best way to measure student performance objectively and uniformly. We can use what



In California we have a rigorous high-school sequence that prepares students for all options in the 21st century marketplace. It's called the "A-G" curriculum. But only 22% of Latino high-school graduates complete A-G, compared with 40% of white students and 58% of Asian American students. Part of the reason is that these students never even have the opportunity to take the right courses. Schools serving large numbers of Latinos are far less likely to offer the full range of courses. (For more information on A-G visit our website at www.edtrustwest.org).

Successful systems know that good teaching matters more than anything else

If we have learned anything over the years it is how much good teaching matters. On this



That means we lose more than 100,000 Latino young people each year after they enter our high schools. And without a statewide data system to monitor the progress of individual students year to year, we have no way of determining when we lose these students, or why.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

There are some schools, districts and even entire states where Latino students are taught to the highest levels.

Miller Elementary School in San Diego, for example, has completely closed the achievement gap. At Miller, 59% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch and 16% are Latino. There, Latino students had a 2003 Growth API of 746, while White students there had an API of 743.

Camellia Elementary School in Sacramento, where 69% of students receive a free or reduced price lunch and 23% are Latino, is another good example. At Carmellia, Latino students had an API of 859, far above the state's goal of 800.



point, the research is unequivocal: the teacher is the single most important factor in whether students learn.

Yet in California schools serving the largest numbers of Latino students are more than three times as likely to have an underqualified teacher than students in schools serving the lowest numbers of Latinos.

What if we had the courage to change these patterns? Recent research conducted by Kain, Rivkin and Hanushek shows that having an above-average teacher five years in a row can completely wipe out the achievement gap.

Do we spend enough on our Latino kids?

We don't spend enough on education in California period. California spends a lower share of its total spending on K-12 education than other states. According to recent research by PPIC, we spend as much as 9% less per pupil.

Moreover, in California as in too many states, districts that educate the greatest number of minority students receive less funding per student than districts with the minority students. Research by the Education Trust has shown that high-minority districts in California receive \$269 in state and local funds less per student, even without using a standard cost-adjustment for the additional cost of educating low-income students.

For a school like South Gate Middle in Los

Angeles Unified, which is 99% Latino, that translates into \$1.15 million in unrealized funds per year.

At a time when schools, districts and states are rightly focusing on closing the achievement gap, California can and must do more to close this funding gap. Certainly more money would help. But spending it more wisely is key and, until more money comes, schools and districts can, must and often do improve.

What would happen if we had the courage to change these patterns?

It should go without saying that Latino students can learn the same material to the same high levels as every other student group. One need only look at the schools, districts and entire states doing this work successfully every day. Indeed, the data show us that California has left all of its students to flounder. Even our White, non-poor students trail the nation in reading and math. But Latino students get the short end of this already short stick.

Underachievement among Latinos is a crisis and a civil rights tragedy. We know that raising Latino achievement and closing the achievement gap can be done. It must be done. It's been fifty years since the Brown decision promised that all children would have an access to the same high levels of education. What are we waiting for?



About the Education Trust West

The Education Trust West is the West Coast presence of the national policy organization, the Education Trust. We work for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, we concentrate on the institutions most often left behind—those serving low-income, Latino, African American or Native American students.

The Education Trust West works alongside policy-makers, parents, education professionals, business and community leaders, in cities and towns throughout California—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We especially work to ensure that all students have the opportunity to enroll in and successfully complete California's college readiness curriculum. In today's and tomorrow's economy, Ready for Work and Ready for College mean the same thing: Ready for Life. Our goal is that high school graduates are empowered and prepared to choose among all postsecondary options.

