

# Investing in Higher Education for Latinos

## Trends in Latino College Access and Success

National  
Conference  
of  
State  
Legislatures

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Improving college completion has become the focus of national and state postsecondary policy goals as the United States pursues the goal of once again having the highest percentage of college graduates in the world by 2020. The economic vitality of states will largely be determined by increasing the number of citizens who earn a college degree in order to keep pace with the increased number of jobs requiring postsecondary education. Latinos—the largest and fastest growing minority group in the nation—have the lowest educational attainment level of any group. Their success is a key component in achieving the U.S. goal and ensuring the future of strong state economies. Because every state faces unique challenges and opportunities to support Latino student success and improve overall college attainment rates, this state-by-state recap of Latino demographic and education trends offers an overview of gaps in each state and the areas that could be targeted to improve Latino student access and success.

### Definitions

**Attainment** – A measure of the overall educational levels of adults in your state.

**Retention** – An indication of whether students successfully continue to enroll in college each semester/quarter until graduation.

**Completion** – Student success in completing college and earning a degree.

**Graduation Rate** – The percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen who complete an associate's or bachelor's degree within three years for associate and six years for bachelor's. (This standard definition is used by the U.S. Department of Education.)

### The Latino Population: Large and Growing Fast

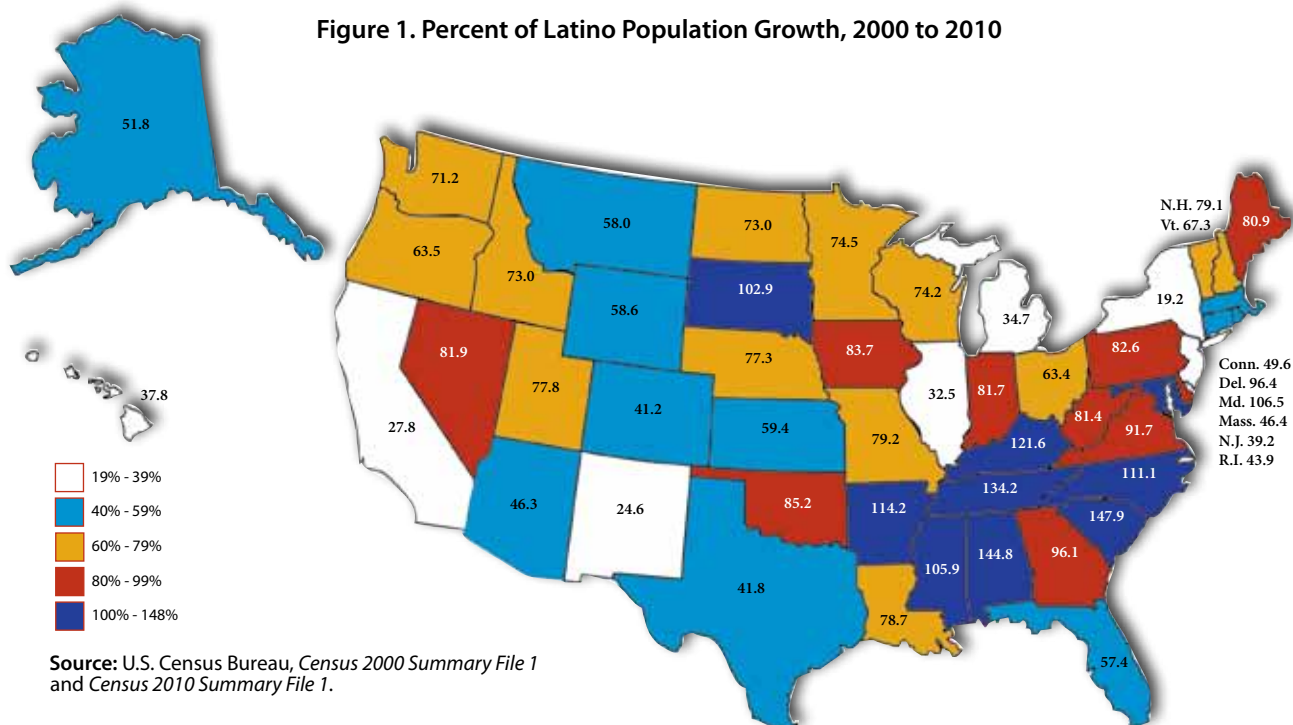
Latinos are the largest minority group in the nation, and the fastest growing of any population. Although certain states have higher concentrations of Latinos than others, rapid growth in the Latino population is occurring in all states. Because the Latino population is much younger than other groups, much of the growth is in the Latino school age population. The Latino population will continue to grow and, by 2050, it is estimated that 30 percent of the U.S. population will be Latino. Currently, Latinos make up more than 16 percent of the U.S. population—50.5 million total, as of the 2010 Census. The educational success of these citizens will determine the strength of a state's workforce and economy. Figure 1 illustrates how state workforces are changing.

The Latino population, which grew 43 percent between 2000 and 2010, made up more than half the total U.S. population growth during this time.<sup>1</sup> One of every four youth under age 18 in the United States is Latino, representing a growth of 39 percent in the last decade. Nine states, many concentrated in the South, saw their Latino population more than double since 2000. Growth in





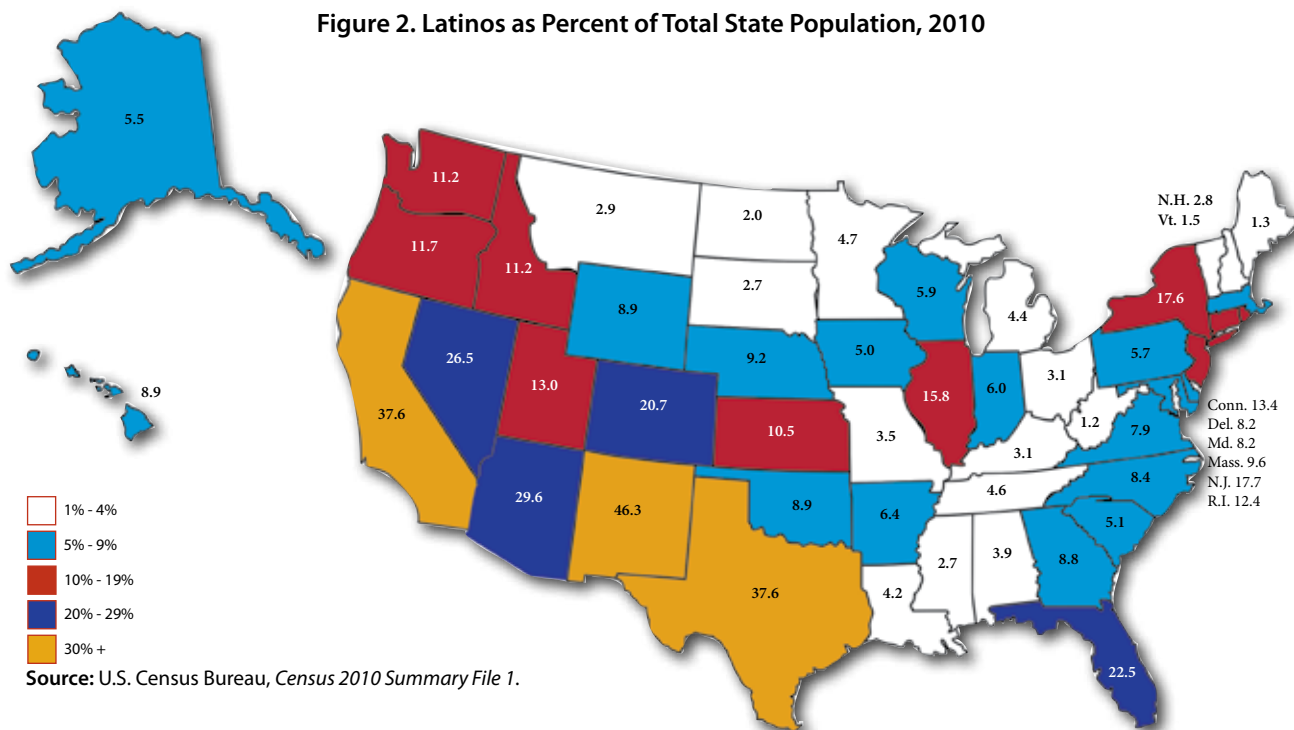
**Figure 1. Percent of Latino Population Growth, 2000 to 2010**



six states—Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island—was due solely to growth in the Latino population. Although Michigan was the only state where total population declined in the 2010 census, there was growth in the Latino population.<sup>2</sup>

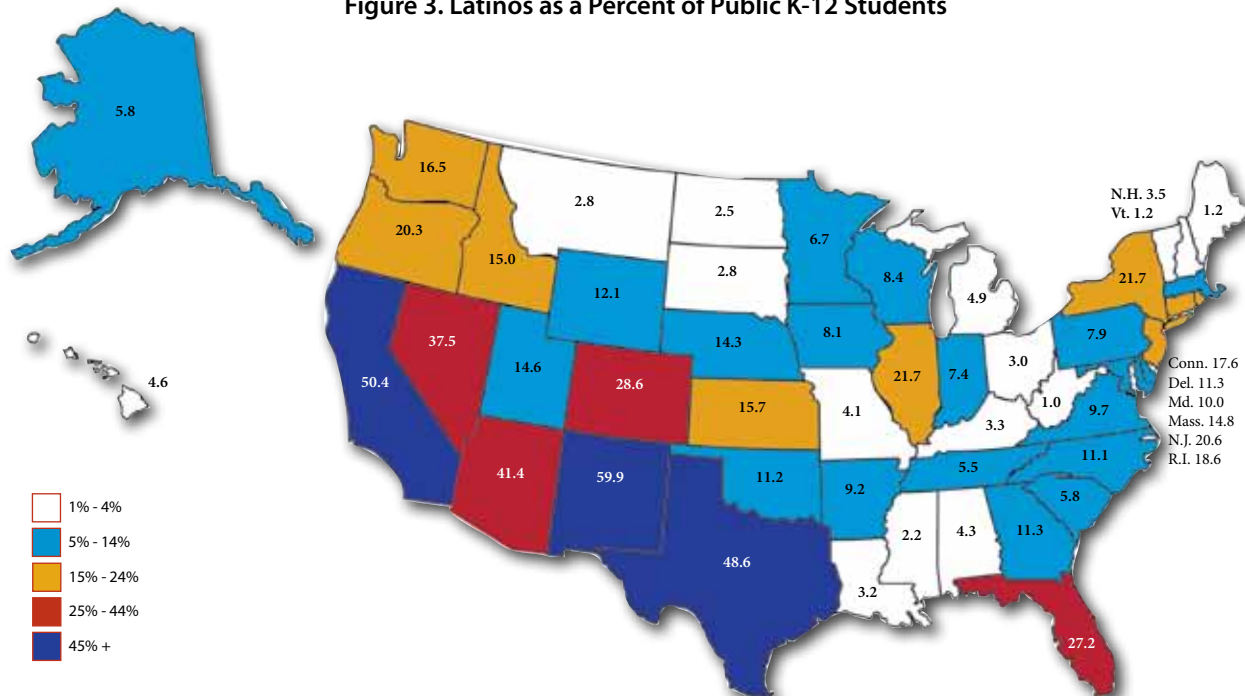
States where Latinos represent the largest share of the population have remained relatively unchanged from the last census; more than half of all U.S. Latinos reside in California, Texas and Florida. Latinos account for more than 25 percent of the total population in five states (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Latinos as Percent of Total State Population, 2010**



Similar growth can be seen in the K-12 Latino school population. Because of the particularly rapid growth in the younger Latino population, K-12 schools are of vital importance; they are responsible for ensuring all students are prepared for postsecondary education. Nationally, 22 percent of students in K-12 schools are Latino, and in seven states Latinos make up more than 25 percent of the K-12 population. In the 2009-2010 school year, Latinos accounted for more than 50 percent of the K-12 students enrolled in California and New Mexico schools (Figure 3). Texas recently reported Latinos to be in the majority in public K-12 schools as of the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 3. Latinos as a Percent of Public K-12 Students**



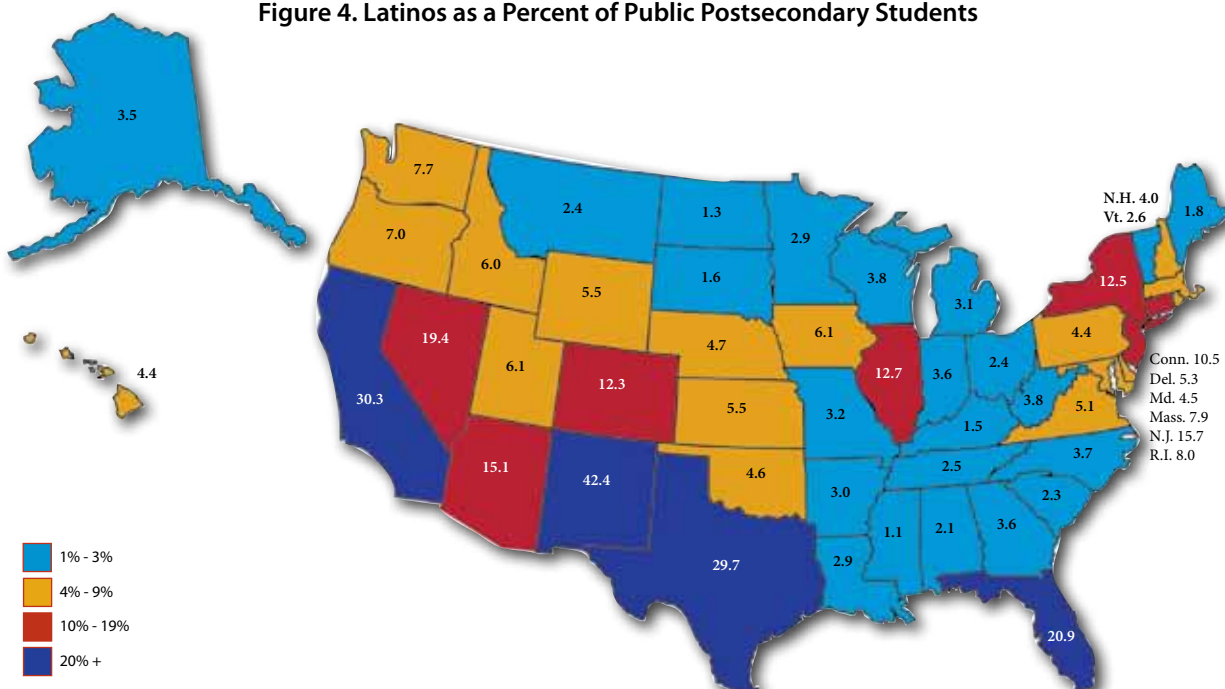
**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2009-10, Version 1a.

As more Latinos graduate from K-12 schools, the number of Latinos attending college has increased. The growth of the Latino population on college campuses has been much slower than at K-12 schools, however, because Latino students are not enrolling at the same rate as their white peers. Currently, just over 12 percent of college students nationally are Latino. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that, by 2020, almost one in four college-age adults will be Latino, however, because Latino students face unique obstacles in accessing and completing their education, they require specific, intentional support to reach their academic goals. For example, many are first generation college-goers—almost 50 percent of Latino undergraduates' parents have never enrolled in or completed college. Without family background in the college experience, these students may find it difficult to fully engage in college life, which can lead them to drop out and not complete a degree.

In four states—California, Florida, New Mexico and Texas—Latinos make up at least 20 percent of college students (Figure 4). Although western and southwestern postsecondary institutions have the largest percentage of Latinos, some of the largest growth in the Latino population has occurred in southern states. As more Latinos attend and graduate from high school, these states are likely to see increased Latino enrollment at public colleges and universities. It is imperative that states plan for this shift in student population in order to ensure that Latino students succeed and complete a degree.



Figure 4. Latinos as a Percent of Public Postsecondary Students



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010.

## Gaps in the Education Pipeline

Despite the fact that Latinos are the fastest growing population in the nation, their college completion rates are not improving, and they continue to fall behind their non-Hispanic peers. Affordability, family and work obligations, and lack of information about financial aid and college life are some of the barriers cited by Latinos to completing their education. Since 63 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary degree by 2018,<sup>4</sup> it becomes essential to develop and implement state policies that support Latino student success.

The education pipeline is one tool that can be used to assess the progress and success of all students. This pipeline highlights various key transitions in students' academic careers, from high school graduation to enrolling in college to

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*Latino high school graduation rates have been improving, but college graduation rates are not; considerable achievement gaps remain compared to their white peers.*

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college completion. Throughout this pipeline, Latino students fall behind other student populations in every key transition. By examining these transitions, states can not only determine where students may be struggling to continue and complete their educational goals, but also can help target appropriate student policies. Looking at this pipeline, high school graduation rates nationally are 16 points higher for white students (82 percent) than for Latino students (66 percent).<sup>5</sup> Of these graduates, 71 percent of white students immediately enroll in college, compared to 59 percent of Latino students.<sup>6</sup> Simply enrolling in college

does not guarantee graduation—only 36 percent of first-time, full-time Latino students earn a degree within six years, compared to 49 percent of whites.

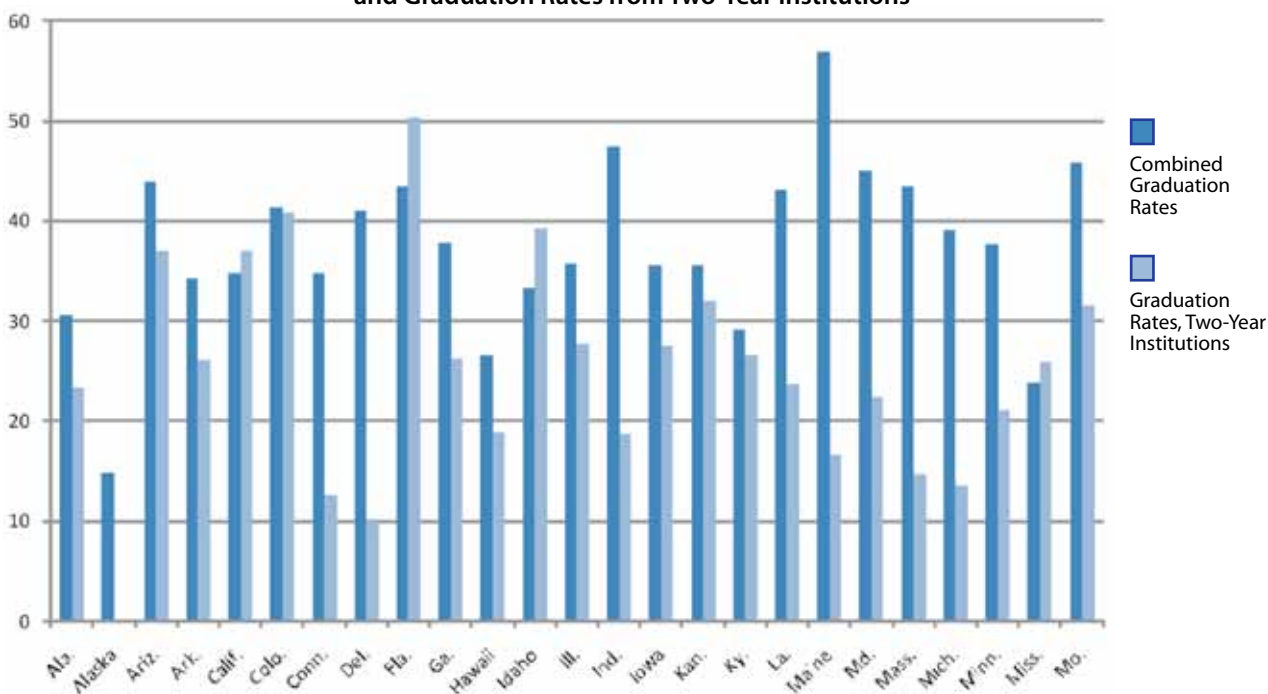
It is clear that merely providing access to college for Latino students is not enough. States must help these students remain in school and earn a degree. Decreasing gaps in high school and college graduation rates between Latino and

white students is an important step in increasing the nation’s overall education attainment, particularly for states that have the largest percentage of Latino students. Successes in these states can help other states that continue to experience rapid growth in Latino population; an increase in Latino public high school graduates of 88 percent is expected between 2005 and 2022.<sup>7</sup> As demographics begin to change in schools that traditionally have not enrolled many Latino students, states will want to proactively develop policies to support the success of this growing Latino population.

Of the states with large Latino populations in college, the highest graduation rates for Latinos are seen in Arizona and Florida, and the lowest are found in New Jersey, New Mexico and Texas (Figure 5). The largest achievement gap is seen in New York, which has a 32 percent graduation rate for Latino students, compared to almost 52 percent for white students. Although the graduation rate for white students in Arizona (51 percent) is similar to that of New York, the gap is significantly smaller; almost 44 percent of Latino students graduate within three or six years (See appendix for additional achievement gap data).

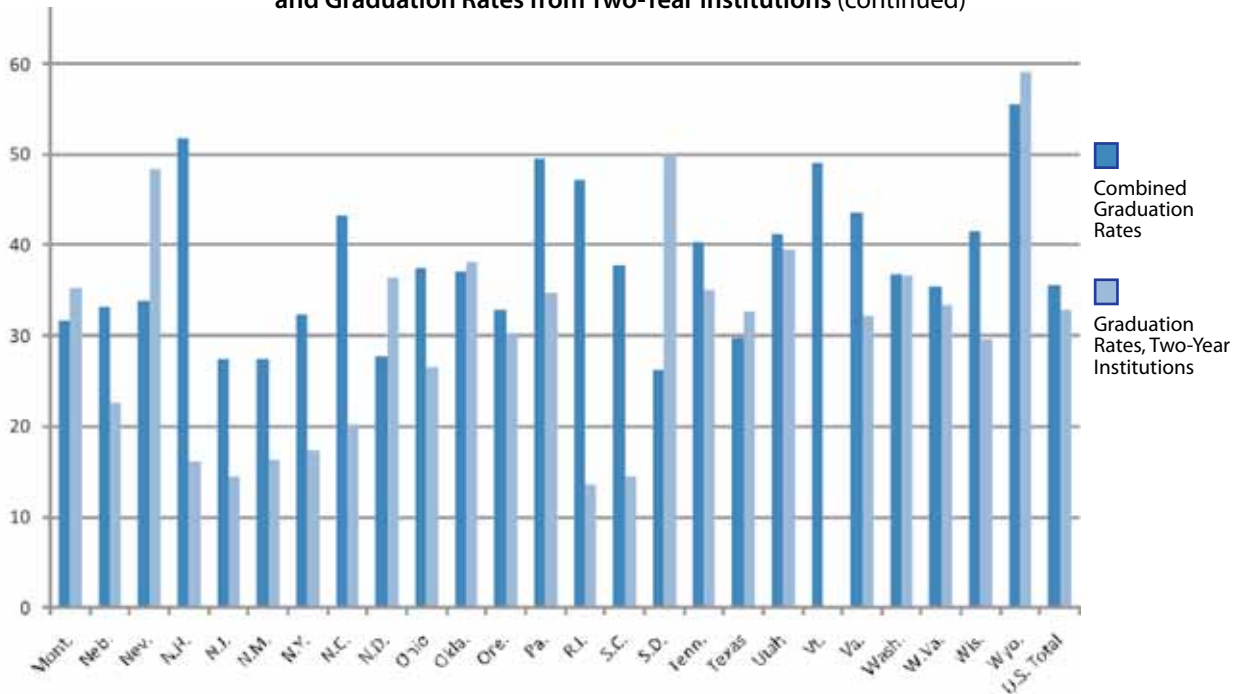
Community colleges, with a total national enrollment of more than 6 million students, serve the most students in the higher education system<sup>8</sup> and are an especially important point of access for Latino students. They offer the affordability, access and flexibility that are necessary to support low-income, working and part-time students, many of whom are Latino. In fact, two-year and less than two-year institutions enroll more than 58 percent of the Latino students currently in college.<sup>9</sup> While graduation rates for students who attend these institutions are low overall (Figure 5), the achievement gap is considerably smaller. In many cases, Latino students have higher graduation rates than their white peers at these institutions. In fact, national graduation rates at two-year schools are about equal for Latino (32.8 percent) and white (32 percent) students. Just over 50 percent of Latino students in two-year schools in Florida earn a degree within three years; in New York, the graduation rate is 17 percent for Latinos in two-year schools. Two-year schools in Texas have one of the largest differences in graduation rates, but Latino students (33 percent) graduate at a higher rate than white students (16 percent). (See appendix for additional achievement gap data)

**Figure 5. Latino Student Combined Graduation Rates from Two- and Four-Year Institutions and Graduation Rates from Two-Year Institutions**





**Figure 5. Latino Student Combined Graduation Rates from Two- and Four-Year Institutions and Graduation Rates from Two-Year Institutions (continued)**

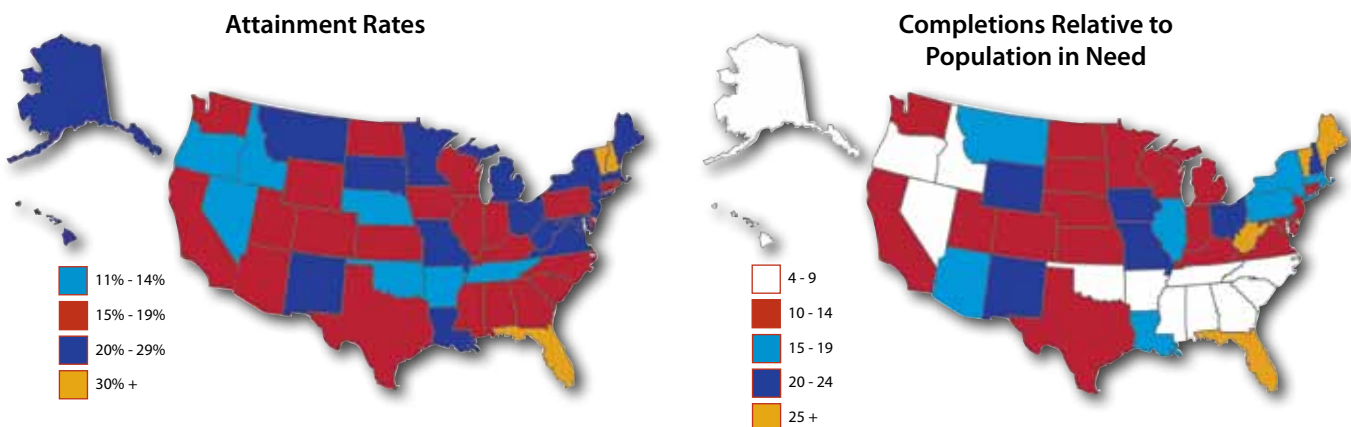


Source: Benchmarking Latino College Completion to Meet National Goals: 2010 to 2020, Excelencia in Education, 2010/ NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2011.

## More Degrees, Fewer Gaps

For the United States to have the highest percentage of college graduates, 13.4 million more adults need to earn degrees by 2020. To reach this goal, almost a quarter of these additional degrees need to be earned by Latino students—3.3 million more Latinos need to earn a degree by 2020.<sup>10</sup> This will require eliminating achievement gaps and increasing completion. Besides graduation rates, other metrics—such as the percentage of adults that currently hold a two-year degree or higher (attainment rate) and the number of degrees awarded per 1,000 adults with no degree (completions relative to population in need)—provide a clearer picture of where Latinos now stand and the progress needed (Figure 6; see appendix for specific state percentages).

**Figure 6. Latino Attainment Rates and Completions Relative to the Population in Need**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey/Benchmarking Latino College Completion to Meet National Goals: 2010 to 2020, Excelencia in Education, 2010.

Latinos have the lowest educational attainment rate—only 19 percent of Latino adults have a degree, compared to 42 percent of whites and 26 percent of African-American adults. The gaps between attainment rates of Latino and white adults, consistently large across states, are particularly noticeable in states that have sizeable Latino populations. (See appendix for additional achievement gap data.)

- California has the largest gap between Latino (15.5 percent) and white (50 percent) adults with degrees.
- Nevada (11.4 percent), Arizona (15.8 percent), Texas (16.2 percent), Illinois (16.5 percent) and Colorado (17.4 percent) Latino attainment rates are lower than the national average, and significant differences exist between Latino and white adults with degrees.
- Florida's rate is one of the highest; 32 percent of Latinos have college degrees, compared to 41 percent of white adults.

Of U.S. working adults, more than 22 percent have attended some college but not completed a degree.<sup>11</sup> Providing opportunities for these adults to return to college and complete their education is one essential way to improve attainment rates. Reaching national attainment goals will require policies that specifically serve the needs of older Latinos, as well. Because Latinos are more likely to enroll part-time and work while attending school,<sup>12</sup> increased support for completion is particularly important for improving their attainment rates. Significant gaps exist between white and Latino adults in the number of degrees awarded relative to all eligible adults (Figure 6). In the United States, 1.5 percent of all potential Latino students earned a degree in 2008, compared to 4.1 percent of potential white students. South Carolina, with the fastest growing Latino population, has one of the lowest rates; fewer than one in 100 potential Latino students earn a degree each year. Other states with rapidly growing Latino populations have similarly low rates, including North Carolina (6.9), Arkansas (7.2), Tennessee (8.2) and Alabama (9.7).

Considering all these indicators, it is important to note that policies targeted to support Latino students can benefit all students. While targeting Latino students is important, increasing retention and college completion for all students is essential. “A rising tide raises all boats,” and a commitment to increasing overall graduation rates also will improve Latino success.<sup>13</sup>

## What Works

This brief provides an overview of state demographic and education trends among Latino populations. Legislators can use this information to guide them in developing policies and strategies to improve Latino college access and success. Some strategies that work for Latino students include the following.

- Use funding or other incentives to encourage and reward Latino's and other minority students' successful graduation.
- Provide better consumer information targeted to Latino students and families.



- Provide options for students to receive career and workforce training as part of their high school and college experience.
- Encourage institutions to measure and report the comparative effectiveness of their programs.
- Simplify transfer between colleges and universities.
- Consider funding or incentives to help institutions expand student support services that help students progress from first year to graduation.
- Fully leverage federal funding—such as the TRIO programs—that awards grants to institutions for student support.
- Ensure that Latino students have evening, weekend and online options for taking courses and obtaining a degree.
- Help reduce remediation of Latino students by improving high school standards and better linking K-12 exit standards with college entrance requirements.

## Resources

National Conference of State Legislatures. *Improving Latino College Completion: What State Legislators Should Know*. Denver, Colo.: NCSL, 2011.

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## Appendix. Achievement Gaps Between Latino and White Students

This chart displays data on both Latino and white students and the difference between the groups in these various measures. The difference between rates of Latino and white students is what is commonly known as the achievement or equity gap. Negative scores indicate Latino students' rates are higher than those of white students.

State	Graduation Rate % (two- and four-year combined)			Graduation Rate for Two-Year Schools %			Attainment Rates %			Completions Relative to Populations in Need		
	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference
Alabama	30.6	40.4	9.8	23.3	22.4	-0.9	15.7	34.1	18.4	9.7	32.6	22.9
Alaska	14.8	26.3	11.5	0.0	11.8	11.8	21.4	41.8	20.4	7.9	16.5	8.6
Arizona	43.9	51.1	7.2	37.0	38.8	1.8	15.8	42.9	27.1	16.6	47.1	30.5
Arkansas	34.3	39.2	4.9	26.1	25.4	-0.7	11.4	28.9	17.5	7.2	33.4	26.2
California	34.8	47.4	12.6	37.0	39.5	2.5	15.5	50	34.5	14.5	41.3	26.8
Colorado	41.4	51.3	9.9	40.9	42.3	1.4	17.4	51.5	34.1	14.9	50	35.1
Connecticut	34.8	53.6	18.8	12.7	14.1	1.4	17.4	50.5	33.1	11.1	38.3	27.2
Delaware	41	56.1	15.1	10.2	13.8	3.6	16.1	40.1	24	11.3	40.4	29.1
Florida	43.5	51.3	7.8	50.4	48.2	-2.2	31.9	40.7	8.8	26.9	44.3	17.4
Georgia	37.8	42.3	4.5	26.2	29.5	3.4	16.7	40.5	23.8	6.7	38.1	31.4
Hawaii	26.5	31.2	4.7	18.9	16.0	-2.9	26.6	51.4	24.8	9.4	32.3	22.9
Idaho	33.3	43.5	10.2	39.2	44.9	5.7	13.8	37.3	23.5	8.6	33	24.4
Illinois	35.8	50.6	14.8	27.7	29.0	1.4	16.5	45.8	29.3	16	52.4	36.4
Indiana	47.5	53.5	6	18.7	25.5	6.8	17	33.9	16.9	12.5	37.9	25.4
Iowa	35.6	53.7	18.1	27.5	39.5	12.0	16.6	39	22.4	20.1	58.4	38.3
Kansas	35.6	47.4	11.8	32.0	36.3	4.3	17.1	42.8	25.7	14.3	50.5	36.2
Kentucky	29.2	41.2	12	26.6	35.6	9.0	19.4	29.5	10.1	10.7	40.8	30.1
Louisiana	43.1	43.3	0.2	23.7	32.6	8.9	22.9	31.3	8.4	15.7	33.9	18.2
Maine	56.9	48.3	-8.6	16.7	26.6	10.0	25.8	37.4	11.6	34.9	29.7	-5.2
Maryland	45	51.8	6.8	22.4	20.9	-1.5	25.1	49.8	24.7	11.8	39.7	27.9
Massachusetts	43.4	59	15.6	14.7	22.9	8.2	21.3	52.7	31.4	17.2	43.5	26.3
Michigan	39.1	46.9	7.8	13.5	18.3	4.8	20.5	37.6	17.1	14.5	38.8	24.3
Minnesota	37.6	49.9	12.3	21.1	32.9	11.8	20.7	46.5	25.8	11.4	54.8	43.4
Mississippi	23.9	36.5	12.6	25.9	28.3	2.4	18.2	33.8	15.6	7.4	35.6	28.2
Missouri	45.8	49.7	3.9	31.6	33.5	1.9	22.5	35.8	13.3	24	37.5	13.5
Montana	31.7	42.3	10.6	35.1	37.7	2.5	22.6	38.7	16.1	15	29.6	14.6
Nebraska	33.1	49.8	16.7	22.6	36.6	14.0	12.4	43.2	30.8	11.1	54.3	43.2
Nevada	33.9	37.7	3.8	48.4	50.1	1.7	11.4	35.2	23.8	4.8	18.5	13.7
New Hampshire	51.7	55.9	4.2	16.2	24.4	8.2	34.1	44.2	10.1	24.4	36.4	12
New Jersey	27.3	44.6	17.3	14.4	23.4	9.0	21.3	48.9	27.6	11	32.6	21.6
New Mexico	27.3	33.9	6.6	16.3	20.3	4.0	20.3	47.4	27.1	20.2	40.8	20.6
New York	32.4	51.8	19.4	17.3	26.7	9.4	22.6	50.8	28.2	15.3	49.2	33.9
North Carolina	43.3	50.1	6.8	20.3	22.8	2.5	15.7	41.4	25.7	6.9	38.7	31.8
North Dakota	27.8	46.3	18.5	36.4	48.1	11.7	16.7	45.4	28.7	11.3	57.4	46.1
Ohio	37.5	49.8	12.3	26.6	32.7	6.1	24.1	35.5	11.4	20.2	35.5	15.3
Oklahoma	37.1	42.8	5.7	38.2	35.1	-3.1	13.8	34.2	20.4	9.9	34.7	24.8
Oregon	32.8	45.2	12.4	30.3	36.2	5.9	14.8	40.7	25.9	8.2	32.3	24.1
Pennsylvania	49.5	60.1	10.6	34.6	40.6	6.0	18.9	39.3	20.5	17.2	42.5	25.3
Rhode Island	47.2	57.7	10.5	13.5	13.8	0.3	19	44	25	16.4	56.8	40.4



State	Graduation Rate % (two- and four-year combined)			Graduation Rate for Two-Year Schools %			Attainment Rates %			Completions Relative to Population in Need		
	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference	Latino	White	Difference
South Carolina	37.8	45.4	7.6	14.5	14.7	0.2	16.8	39.6	22.8	7.4	36	28.6
South Dakota	26.2	51.3	25.1	50.0	65.5	15.5	20.1	39.8	19.7	11.6	46.3	34.7
Tennessee	40.4	44	3.6	35.1	39.0	3.9	14.7	32.3	17.6	8.2	26.6	18.4
Texas	29.7	39.6	9.9	32.6	19.5	-13.1	16.2	43.4	27.2	13.7	34.7	21
Utah	41.1	48.8	7.7	39.5	46.3	6.7	17.3	43.2	25.9	12.8	49.2	36.4
Vermont	49.1	63.3	14.2	0.0	11.0	11.0	43.2	45.1	1.9	55.3	44.7	-10.6
Virginia	43.6	56.7	13.1	32.2	26.3	-5.9	28.2	47.1	18.9	12.5	39.1	26.6
Washington	36.7	52.8	16.1	36.6	38.4	1.8	17.3	44.6	27.3	14.3	38.7	24.4
West Virginia	35.4	40.5	5.1	33.3	33.8	0.5	29	25.3	-3.7	35.6	32.2	-3.4
Wisconsin	41.6	53.7	12.1	29.6	39.5	10.0	17.4	40.2	22.8	14.4	48.8	34.4
Wyoming	55.5	59.4	3.9	59.1	54.5	-4.6	17.1	37.2	20.1	20.3	46.4	26.1
<i>US Total</i>	35.6	49.3	13.7	32.8	32.0	-0.7	18.6	42.2	23.6	14.9	40.9	26

Sources: Benchmarking Latino College Completion to Meet National Goals: 2010 to 2020, Excelencia in Education, 2010; NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey.

## Notes

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