

A Brief Demographic Portrait

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A demographic portrait, with particular emphasis on school-related issues, points to the dire situation of Latino/a education. According to the 2010 Census, the number of Hispanics (the term used in government data) currently was 50,477,594 million, an increase of 43 percent since 2000, making this group the fastest growing of all ethnic/racial groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinos/as represent 16 percent of the total U.S. population, meaning that they are the largest so-called “minority” group in the nation. Approximately 63 percent of Latinos/as living in the U.S. are of Mexican origin, 9 percent are Puerto Rican, 3.5 percent are Cuban, 3 percent are Salvadoran and 2.8 percent are Dominican, with smaller percentages of other Central American, South American or other Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Over half of all Hispanics resided in 3 states: California, Texas, and Florida. Nevertheless, the growth of the Hispanic population in other regions of the nation has been dramatic. The 2010 Census documented what many cities and towns throughout the nation had already experienced: between 2000-2010, the Hispanic population grew in every region, most significantly in the South and Midwest. One reason for this increase is that the number of Hispanics in states where they have not traditionally resided is growing exponentially. For example, in 2010, 36 percent of all Hispanics resided in the South, a growth of 57 percent since 2000, or 4 times the growth of the total population growth in the South. In the Midwest, the Hispanic population grew by 49 percent, or 12 times the growth of the total population in the South.

Not surprisingly, Latino/a children make up a large proportion of the growth of the community. For example, the percentage of Latino/a children within the general population increased from 12 percent (5.1 million) in 1990 to 23 percent (12.1 million) in 2010, making this the fastest growing group of children in the country (Aud et al., 2012). By 2020, it is estimated that one in every four children will be Hispanic, and according to one report, this is already the case in U.S. preschool and kindergarten classrooms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). A young population, there are 17.1 million Latinos/as aged 17 and younger in the U.S., more than 23 percent of the total age group in the nation. More than 12.4 million Hispanic children attend the country's elementary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, less than half of all Latino/a children have access to early learning programs, in spite of the fact that enrollment in such programs have been proven to improve the cognitive, social, emotional, and language development of children (Department of Education, 2011).

Although growing in number, the Hispanic population is still underserved in many ways. Strength in numbers alone, therefore, does not correlate with educational progress. For example, many Latino/a children live in poverty. A 2012 report found that 63 percent of Latino/a children lived in low-income families (what the National Center for Children in Poverty describes as the “near poor”), and 32 percent lived in poverty, compared with 31 and 13 percent of White children, respectively (Addy & Wight, 2012). As a result of segregated residential housing patterns, more Hispanic and African American students attend high-poverty schools (37 percent) than do Asian/Pacific Islander (12 percent) or White (6 percent) students (Aud et al., 2012). Consequently, the educational attainment of Latinos/as remains lower than that of any other group (Aud et al., 2012).

Where students attend schools adds to the problem. Urban areas, where most Latino/a students live, tend to have school systems with crumbling infrastructures and fewer resources than suburban schools. Because about 65 percent of Latino/a students live in large urban areas, many attend schools in economically distressed communities. For instance, 37 percent of Hispanic students attend high-poverty schools, that is, schools where 76 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. In contrast, only 6 percent of White students attend high-poverty schools. At the elementary level, the percentage of Hispanics who attend high-poverty schools is even higher at 45 percent, while for White students it is 7 percent (Aud et al., 2012).

English Language Learners (ELLs), who represent a significant number of Latino/a students, are especially vulnerable. Numbering 4.7 million, they are about 10 percent of the nation's students in grades K-12 (Department of Education, 2011). In fact, data show that approximately 37 percent of ELLs are behind their White peers

in math and 47 percent are behind in reading. The situation worsens as they progress through the grades: by 8th grade, 51 percent of ELLs are behind Whites in both reading and math (Fry, 2008). Specifically, 72 percent of ELLs score below basic in reading and 74 below basic in mathematics (Department of Education, 2011). According to one report, when English Language Learners are not isolated in low-achieving schools, their gap in test score results is considerably narrower (Fry, 2008). Given recent trends in dismantling desegregation efforts, the future looks grim for Latino/a students who are segregated in low-achieving schools.

The dropout rate among Hispanic students has remained stubbornly high for decades, fluctuating anywhere between 40-80 percent depending on the year (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Nieto, 2000b). Currently, only about half of all Latino/a students graduate from high school (Department of Education, 2011). Between 1980 and 2011, while the percentage of Hispanics who had attained a high school diploma or equivalency increased dramatically, from 58 to 71 percent, it was still markedly lower than for Whites at 94 percent and Blacks at 88 percent (Aud et al., 2012). At the postsecondary level, the numbers are also alarming. From 1980 to 2011, the gap in the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher between Whites and Hispanics had widened from 17 to 26 percent (Aud et al., 2012). Just 13 percent of Latinos/as have a bachelor's degree and only 4 percent have completed graduate or professional degree programs (Department of Education, 2011).

All in all, the lack of academic success among Latinos/as presents serious implications that reverberate within and well beyond the Latino/a population. In the sections that follow, we discuss some of these implications through three lenses: *Interpersonal Relationships*, *Instructional Strategies*, and the broader *Institutional Context* of schools and society.