



EDUCATION

The demographics of our nation are changing, and Latinos are paving the way. In 2015, for the first time in history, our nation's public schools are what is commonly referred to as majority-minority: more than 50% of students are Latino, African American, Asian American, Native American, or two or more races. This revelation is still so new that the terminology has not yet caught up with the demographic reality. Children of color are no longer the minority, but the new majority of students in our public schools, and this is due to the growth of the Latino community; while Latinos have grown to 17% of the total population, we represent more than 25% of the students in our nation's public schools.³¹

The future economic competitiveness of the United States will depend in great part on the educational attainment of the nation's growing Hispanic community. Increasing the high school graduation and college completion rates among all Latino student groups will translate into higher lifetime salaries, raise the standard of living for millions of Latino families, and strengthen the economic base of the United States.

Much work remains to be done. Hispanics have lacked many of the opportunities and access to a quality and comprehensive education that others have enjoyed. According to 2015 Census Bureau data, 75% of 25 to 29-year-old Hispanics have at least a high school diploma, compared to 96% of non-Hispanic Whites in the same age range. Similarly, only 15% of Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 29 have bachelor's degrees compared to 41% of non-Hispanic Whites in the same age range.³²

An academically sound and comprehensive education is critical for Hispanics to achieve success in any career or profession. Ensuring a quality education for Latinos will require a commitment at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure that each level of our educational system meets the needs of America's new and emerging demographics.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Latinos are the racial or ethnic group least likely to be enrolled in early childhood education, according to a 2015 study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In a study of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in preschool, Latinos trailed behind other groups at 37% enrollment, as compared to 48% enrollment of African American children, and 49% of non-Hispanic White children.³³ Without an academically robust early childhood education, Latino children will start elementary school behind their peers, and be less prepared to move up the education ladder leading to academic and career success.

Policy Recommendations

- Institute universal pre-school that meets national standards.
- Increase financial support for Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Ensure that Migrant and Seasonal Head Start provides after-school and daytime activities for children to prevent them from being pulled into farm labor.
- Establish support for schools of education and teacher colleges to establish teacher education programs in culturally and linguistically competent early childhood instruction that addresses the educational and developmental needs of Hispanics and English Learner (EL) students, and that increases the ability of school officials to communicate effectively with limited English proficient parents.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

In late 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) was signed into law, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). First enacted fifty years ago in 1965, ESEA is a civil rights bill written to ensure equal access to a quality education. Within those fifty years, the Latino community has grown from roughly 3% of the nation, to 17% today nationwide, and 25% of students in public schools.³⁴ It is because of this growth in the Latino community that students of color are no longer the minority, but the new majority of students in our nation's public schools.

The ESSA pushes much of the decision-making to ensure equal access to education to state and local government. The Department of Education must issue strong federal regulatory guidance, and states must ensure vigorous implementation and enforcement, in implementing ESSA consistent with the law and with the NHLA's policy recommendation outlined below



Institute universal pre-school that meets national standards.

Policy Recommendations

- Require states, districts, and schools to collect, and make available annually, disaggregated data on student subgroup and overall school progress.
- Ensure all students have access to:
 - High academic standards that are statewide and prepare students for college and career;
 - Curricula that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and aligned to a state's college- and career-ready standards; and
 - Culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments of student progress, not based on a single high-stakes test, but based only on measures of student academic performance.

- Ensure that every child has the resources needed to succeed, by requiring intervention where there are disparities in access to educational resources.
- Ensure that Latino students have equal access to high-quality teaching.
- Ensure that Latino students have unfettered and equal access to high-level enrichment opportunities outside the classroom.
- Ensure that successful efforts are implemented to reduce elevated rates of high school non-completion among both Latino boys and Latina girls.

Ensure that schools, districts, and states are held accountable for the performance of all students.

- Ensure that systems are accountable for the performance of students by:
 - Assessing all students with statewide annual assessments, including students with disabilities except for the most cognitively disabled 1%, and English learners except during their first year in the country;
 - Including performance goals to reduce student achievement gaps; these goals must aim toward equity of outcomes at all levels of achievement, not simply to an established competency floor; and
 - Requiring proven remedies/interventions that reduce student achievement gaps.

- Expand Latino-serving programs to meet full needs of the community, including:
 - Accountability, data, and parental involvement (Title I, Part A);
 - The Migrant Education Program (Title I, Part C); and
 - Language instruction for English learners (Title III).

- Ensure states set rigorous proficiency targets for the English language proficiency of English Learners, and ensure that assessments are culturally and linguistically competent, and aligned to state college and career-ready standards.

- Ensure that English proficiency for English Learners is a significant portion of every state's accountability system. Cross-tabulate data by race, gender, English Learner status, student with disability status, and economic disadvantage, so that disparities can be better identified, and interventions can be better tailored to the needs of the involved student groups.
- Ensure that state plans do not diminish accountability for any subgroup of students, and that accountability applies to all groups of students protected by ESEA, including racial and ethnic subgroups, English Learners, students with disabilities, and the economically disadvantaged.
- Ensure states collect and report data in a manner that does not mask student subgroup performance or rob school officials of the ability to narrowly tailor improvement interventions to address persistent subgroup achievement gaps unique to a subgroup.
- Ensure that schools, districts, and states are held accountable for the performance of all students in all schools, not just the lowest-performing schools.
- Ensure that state and local plans do not disrupt standing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) settlements with particular districts within those states.
- Pilot test the feasibility for states and districts to collect and report subgroup data within the larger English learner category, including recently arrived English Learners, long-term English Learners, former English Learners, and interrupted English Learners.

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Within many schools, Latinos are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and referred to law enforcement.³⁴ These exclusionary discipline practices are directly contrary to the goal of equal access to education for all students. These practices also have a disproportionate impact on the Latino community. For instance, criminalization of simple disciplinary matters could send a student to prison, but if that child is an immigrant, it could bar that child from ever receiving temporary or permanent status, and may make that child eligible for deportation. Criminal convictions can also bar a child from ever obtaining federal financial aid to go to college.

Policy Recommendations

- End the practices of suspension, expulsion, zero-tolerance policies, the criminalization of truancy, and involuntary school transfers.
- Collect data on suspension, expulsion, involuntary school transfers, and in-school arrests by subgroup, and require that disparities between racial and ethnic groups, English Learners, students with disabilities, and gender be addressed.
- Require that school resource officers be equitably distributed between schools, not concentrated in schools that predominantly serve low-income students and students of color.
- Ensure that teachers are trained on classroom management as an alternative to suspension, expulsion, and the criminalization of in-school behavior.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Enrollment in higher education has become a major achievement of the Latino community. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, for the first time in 2012, Latino enrollment of 18-24 year olds in college surpassed that of White students, at 49% and 47% respectively.³⁵

However, Latino college completion rates lag far behind those of other groups. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than a third of Latinos graduate from four-year institutions in four years, at 29.8% as compared to 43.3% for White students.³⁶ This trend remains true in public and private, for profit and non-profit institutions. Thus, the NHLA recommends programs that will help students afford to stay in college, obtain necessary supports, and earn their degrees.

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen financial aid programs to make college affordable by:
 - Decreasing interest rates on federal student loans;
 - Increasing Pell Grant caps and making Pell Grants available year-round;
 - Increasing income protection allowances, and matching them to inflation to better determine financial need;
 - Simplifying the procedure for migrant and homeless students to complete and file their financial aid applications;
 - Allowing educational loans to be discharged in bankruptcy;
 - Expanding income-based repayment by:
 - Giving all borrowers the option to pay back their educational loans at 10% of their discretionary income;
 - Waiving accrued interest for former Pell grant recipients; and
 - Reducing the marriage penalty to 50% of the combined household adjusted gross income for married borrowers.
 - Expanding student loan debt forgiveness programs by:
 - Creating a new public service loan repayment plan for borrowers who are working in public service or as teachers, in which payments would be 5% of discretionary income and under which unpaid interest would not accrue;
 - Increasing the amount forgiven by the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program; and
 - Restoring the access to federal financial aid for current and formerly incarcerated potential students.
- Support enactment of the DREAM Act, to allow undocumented students to qualify for federal financial aid.
- Support state-level measures that allow long-tenured graduates of a state's high schools to qualify for in-state tuition.

- Regulate for-profit institutions that receive federal financial aid, in which Hispanic students are disproportionately enrolled, to ensure that they provide students with a quality education that adequately prepares them for gainful employment and does not overburden the students with loan debt.
- Increase funding for college preparation programs that assist low income students and students of color to gain access to higher education opportunities, including federal TRIO programs; Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP); Title IV, Part A; Special Programs for Migrant Students (High School Equivalency Program (HEP); and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)).
- Fully fund Title V of the Higher Education Act (HEA), which gives undergraduate and graduate support to Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).
- Work to ensure that all universities, including flagship institutions, admit and enroll groups of students commensurate with the demographics of the state. Eliminate admissions criteria that are not educational necessary and have a discriminatory effect on Latino and Latina students.
- Increase federal resources for K-12 schools and teacher preparation programs to recruit a diverse teaching body, and train student teachers in cultural and linguistic competency with diverse student bodies, as well as incorporating STEM into K-12 curricula.
- Expand support to schools of education at HSIs to increase the number of Latino elementary and secondary school teachers.
- Support the creation of a capacity-building program at HSIs to be housed within pertinent federal agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation; U.S. Department of Commerce; U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Department of Energy, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) to support the training and retraining of faculty and curriculum development for STEM education.
- Extend funding past 2019 of Title III, Part F of HEA, which promotes articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions and professional schools to prepare students in STEM careers.

- Increase federal and state support to HSIs to:
 - Provide advanced training and development in STEM areas for elementary and secondary school teachers;
 - Expand the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in STEM areas in schools with large numbers of Latino students;
 - Promote awareness of higher education options for students in the varied STEM fields; and
 - Support HSIs to enhance and expand counseling programs to train culturally and linguistically prepared counselors capable of addressing the needs of Hispanics and English learner students.
- Measure, monitor, and incentivize community colleges to successfully transfer higher proportions of students to four year institutions, and to eliminate subgroup transfer differentials.

Promote awareness of higher education options for students in the varied STEM fields.



TEACHERS, COUNSELORS, ADMINISTRATORS

Nationally, Latino students comprise 25% of the children in K-12 public schools, but Latino teachers only represent 8% of teachers.³⁷ Closing this massive gap between teacher workforce and student enrollment will require investing in and supporting the teacher preparation work at Minority-Serving Institutions, which prepare most teachers of color. Additionally, all teachers must be culturally and linguistically competent, and prepared for the diversity within their classrooms.

Policy Recommendations

- Ensure that students of color have equitable access to quality teachers, counselors, and school administrators.
- Develop assessments and certifications of cultural competency and assign teachers appropriately based on such assessment and training.
- Ensure quality professional development for teachers of Latino, English Learner and migrant students, to ensure these teachers are culturally and linguistically competent.
- Ensure that the definition of Profession-Ready teacher and principal currently in the Educator Preparation Reform Act is included in Title II of the Higher Education Act.
- Develop partnerships between school districts and colleges and universities to provide degree advancement and professional development to teachers of Latino and English Learner students.
- Provide federal resources to train principals, superintendents, and other high-level school officials with cultural and linguistic competency.
- Ensure that Latinos are being recruited to serve in high-level positions within colleges and universities, including but not limited to presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and similar positions.
- Ensure that programs are in place aimed at retaining Latino and Latina higher education professionals.

VETERANS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

According to the U.S. Department of Affairs, Latinos make up the largest single group of veterans under 34 years old, at 19% as compared to White veterans at 7%, and African American veterans at 11%.³⁸ This continues a long tradition of service in the Latino community; Hispanics have served in every war since the American Revolution, many making the ultimate sacrifice to protect our nation. After World War II, the Montgomery G.I. Bill was the first federal program to grant higher education assistance. To this day, the G.I. Bill assists veterans, including Hispanics, to pursue higher education.

Unfortunately, the Montgomery G.I. Bill does not provide meaningful outreach provisions to assist the Office of Veterans Affairs with resources to identify and reach out to Hispanic veterans, and other veterans of color to encourage and support access to higher education.

Policy Recommendations

- Fund proactive college outreach and recruitment of Hispanic veterans, and other veterans of color, as well as programs that provide academic and related support services to eligible veterans enrolled in Hispanic-Serving Institutions and other Minority-Serving Institutions.
- Include a college outreach and guidance plan for veterans as they enlist into the armed services, throughout transitions in location of service, and as they approach the conclusion of their term of service.
- Promote awareness of the extension of Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits to immediate family members in communities of color.