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Latinos in Massachusetts Public Schools: New Bedford

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New Bedford

This report provides a snapshot of current educational outcomes of Latino students in the city of New Bedford. It is based on publicly available data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE) that has been analyzed by the Gastón Institute for the *2013 Latinos in Massachusetts Regional Meeting* in New Bedford. This report uses the ethno-racial categories assigned by MADESE. It focuses on the evolving demographic trends and the most recent educational outcomes of Latino students relative to other ethno-racial groups in the school district. The first section illustrates the demographic shift occurring in the New Bedford Public Schools, with a growing Latino student population and a shrinking White and African-American/Black student population. The second section compares the performance of Latino students in New Bedford on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests with the performance of all students statewide and other ethno-racial groups in New Bedford. The third section shows Latino graduation and dropout rates, and college enrollment rates, relative to White students in the district and to all students statewide. The second and third sections show that despite disparities in outcomes, the achievement gap between Latino and White students has been shrinking over recent years. Latino students in New Bedford have made especially large improvements on the Grade 10 ELA and Science tests.

Notes

[1] While analyzing and presenting the data using MADESE's ethno-racial categories, we use the term "Latino" rather than "Hispanic."

Demographics

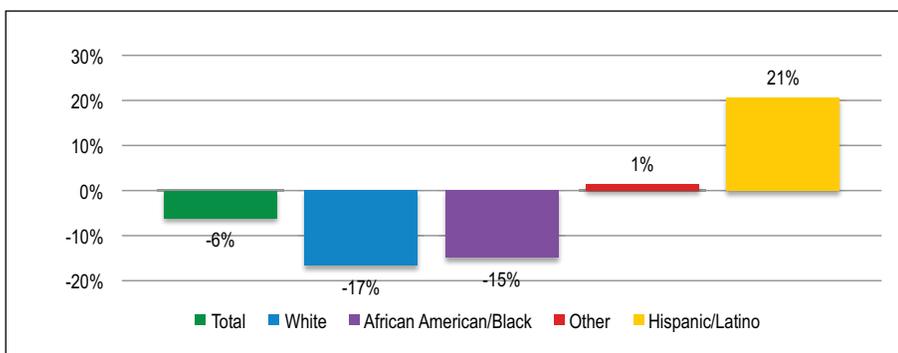**Figure 1: New Bedford Ethno-Racial Composition, SY2013**
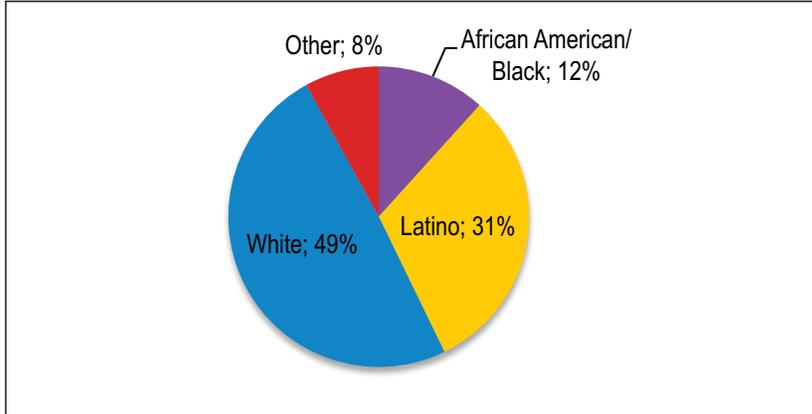
Source: MADESE. (n.d.). *Enrollment Data*.

New Bedford is the eighth largest school district in Massachusetts with 12,616 students. In SY2013, the diverse school district comprised 49% White students, 31% Latino students, 12% African-American/Black students, and 8% "other" students. Approximately 10% of these 3,924 Latino students are classified as Limited English Proficient. This is also a highly mobile student group with 23% of all Latino students changing schools and 14% leaving the district during SY2012 (both well above the district rates of 19% and 11% respectively).

As demonstrated in Figure 2 below, New Bedford has experienced a demographic shift in recent years. Since SY2006, the overall student enrollment has decreased by 6%, with the White student enrollment decreasing by 15% and the African-American/Black student enrollment decreasing by 17%. During this same period, the number of Latino students increased by 21%.

Figure 2: Percentage Change in Enrollment, SY2006 to SY2013

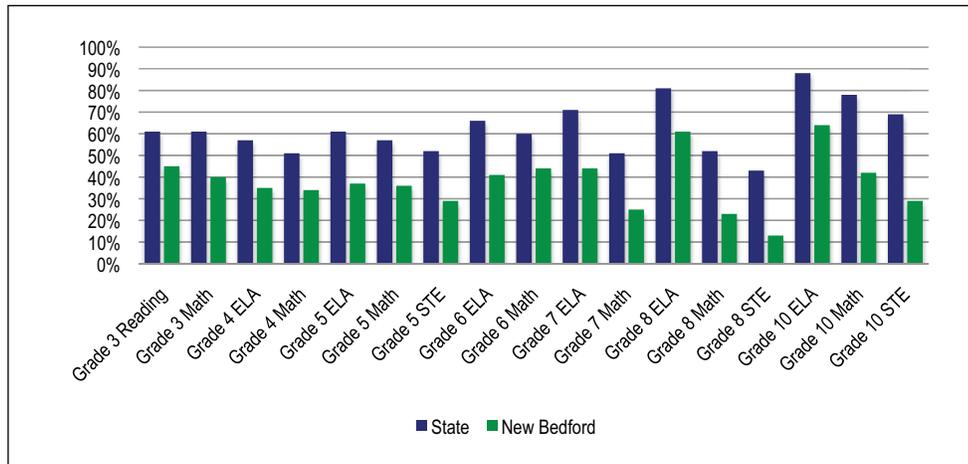Source: Author's calculations based on MADESE (2012) Enrollment

MCAS Performance

New Bedford, as a district, performs below state averages on the state standardized test, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. As seen in Figure 3, on every subject and in every grade, a lower percentage of students in New Bedford score "Proficient" or higher on the MCAS as compared to all students statewide. Furthermore, this performance gap is the largest in Grades 8 and 10, which is of particular concern considering that the Grade 10 MCAS tests are graduation requirements for all students.

Latino students in New Bedford also perform at a lower level than Latino students statewide, with lower percentages of students scoring "Proficient" or higher on the various MCAS tests. The one exception is Grade 3 Reading MCAS, where a slightly higher percentage of Latino students in New Bedford score "Proficient" or higher than Latino students statewide. As with the gap for all students, the performance gap between Latino students in New Bedford and Latino students statewide is larger for the higher grade tests.

This section highlights the performance by Latino students in New Bedford on the Grade 3 Reading and Grade 10 English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science/Technology/Engineering (STE) tests, all important performance measures. Grade 3 Reading is considered an important time when students go from learning how to read to learning from reading. The Grade 10 MCAS tests are crucial for students: all students in Massachusetts are required to pass the Grade 10 ELA, Math, and STE MCAS tests in order to qualify for a high school diploma.
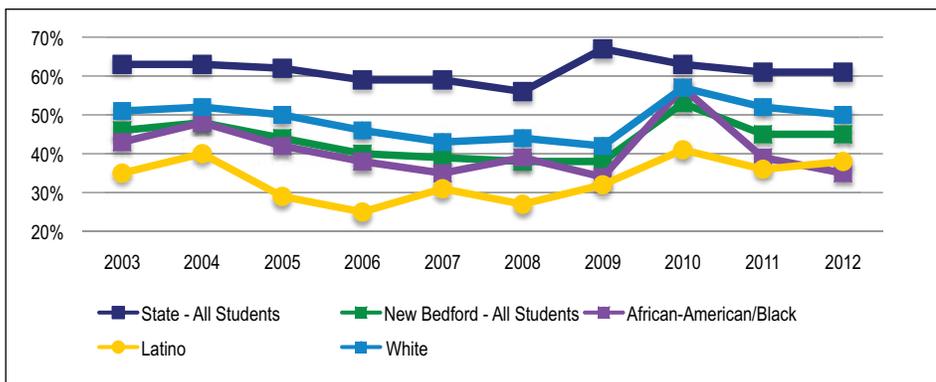
Figure 4: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 3 Reading MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2012
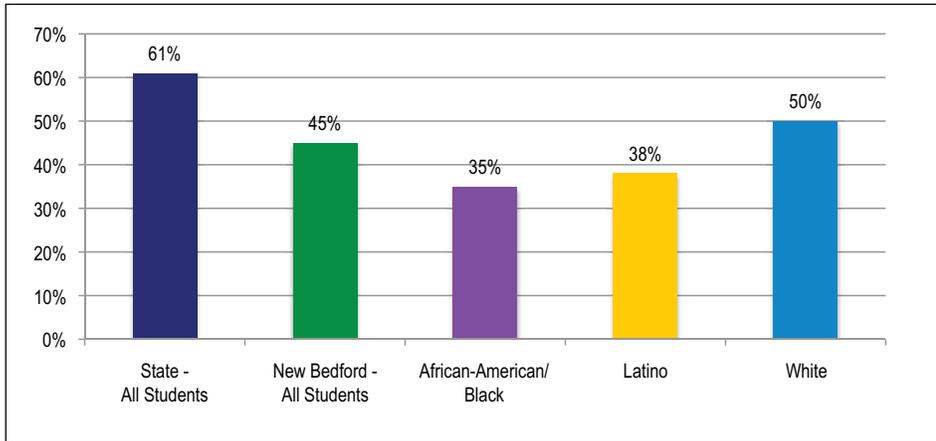
Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

In SY2012, 38% of Latino students in New Bedford performed at "Proficient" or higher on the Grade 3 Reading MCAS. Figure 4 above illustrates how this rate was slightly higher than the proficiency rate for African-American/Black students but 12 percentage points lower than the White proficiency rate. Of additional concern is the 19% of Latino student who scored in the "Warning" category, the highest among all ethno-racial groups in the district. While the proportion of Latino students scoring "Proficient" or higher has increased by 13 percentage points since SY2006, it remains below the rate for White students. Figure 5 shows that the gap with White students in New Bedford and with students statewide remains the same as it was in SY2003.

Figure 5: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 3 Reading MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003–SY2012

Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

Figure 6: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 10 ELA MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2012

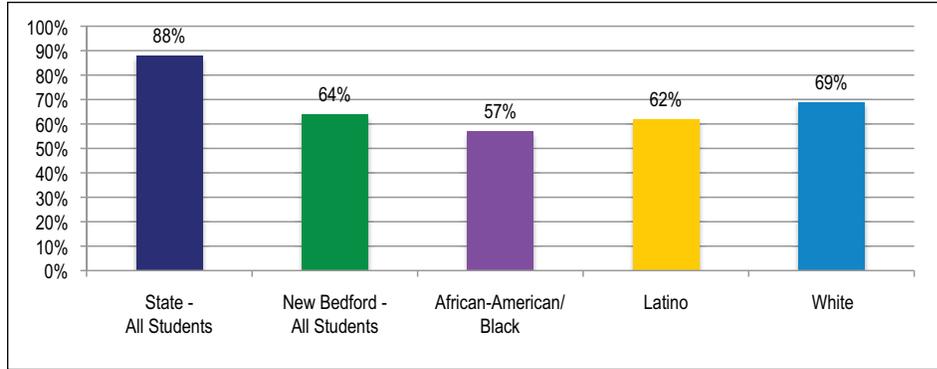Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

In SY2012, 62% percent of Latino students in New Bedford scored "Proficient" or higher on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS, 7 percentage points below the pass rate for White students in New Bedford. Figure 7 below illustrates that the Grade 10 ELA pass rate for Latino students in New Bedford increased steadily from 11% in SY2003 to 62% in SY2013. During this period, New Bedford Latino students closed almost 80% of the White–Latino performance gap in New Bedford and 33% of the gap with all students statewide.

Figure 7: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 10 ELA MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003–SY2012

Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*
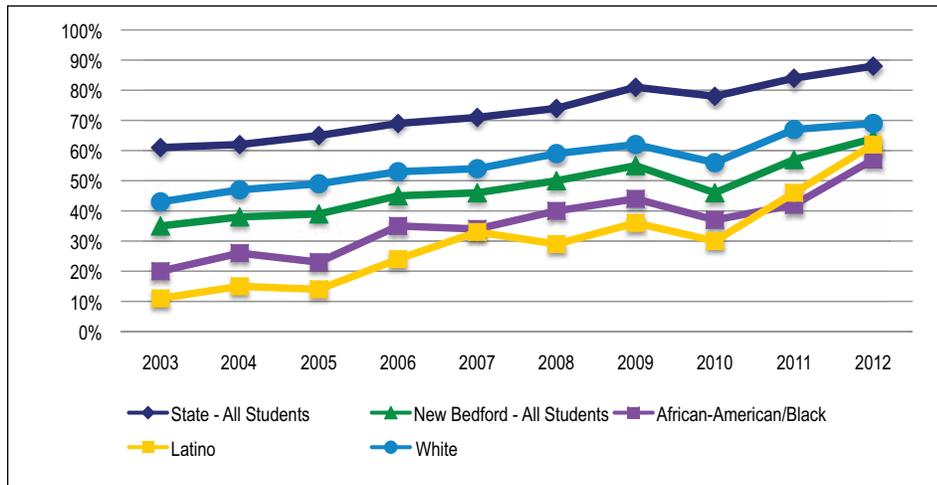
Figure 8: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 10 Math MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2012

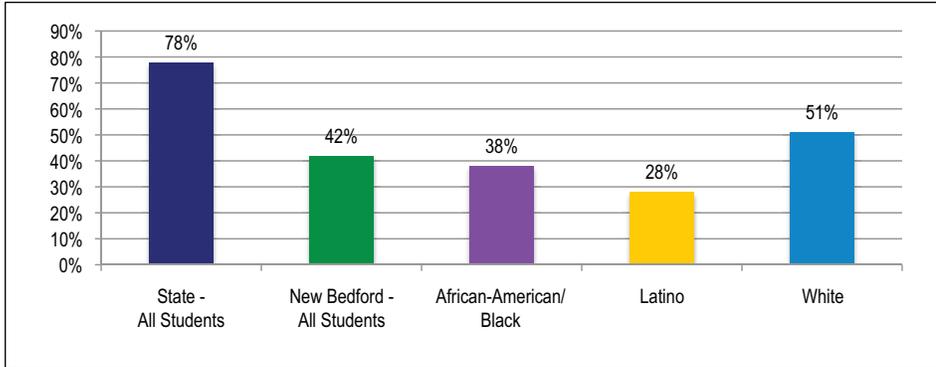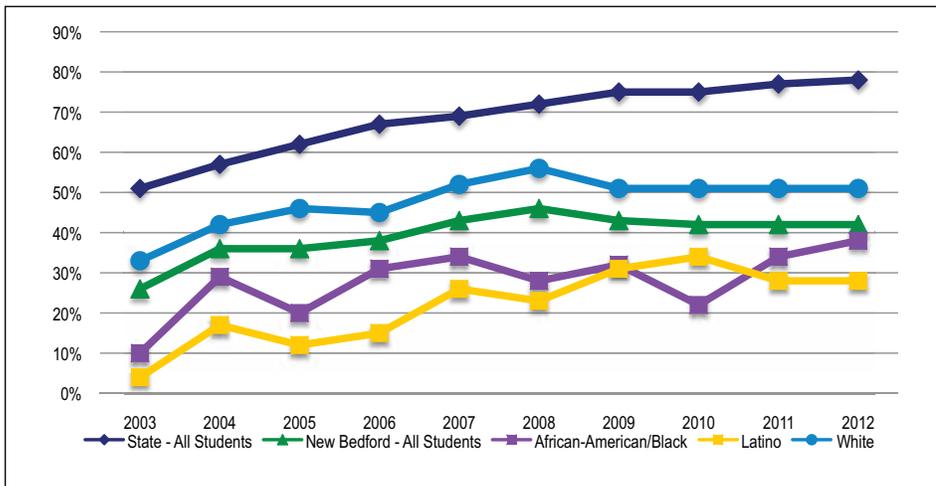Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

As seen in Figure 8 above, Latino students in New Bedford have struggled on the Grade 10 Math MCAS, with only 28% passing the test in SY 2012. This pass rate was far below other ethno-racial groups in the district and 50 percentage points below the statewide pass rate. While the 28% New Bedford Latino pass rate was much higher than the 4% rate in SY2003, it fell far below other groups. Figure 9 shows that over this time, Latino students in New Bedford closed the gap with White students in New Bedford by 21%, but the gap with all students statewide actually increased slightly.

Figure 9: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" or Higher, Grade 10 Math MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003–SY2012

Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

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Figure 10: Percentage of Students Scoring "Needs Improvement" or Higher, Grade 10 STE MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2012

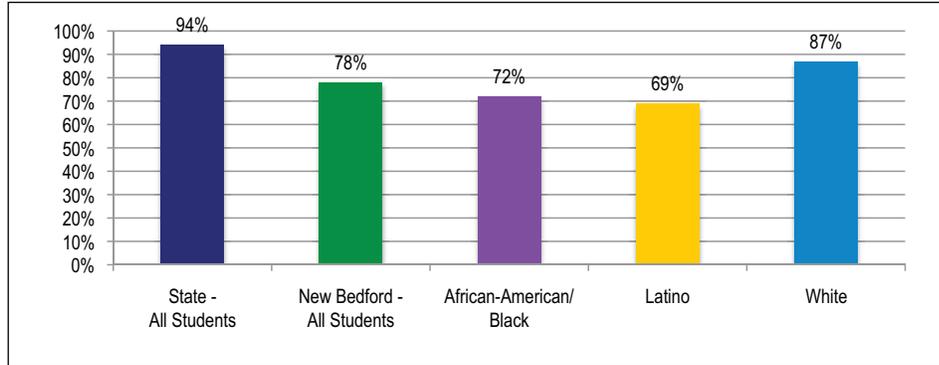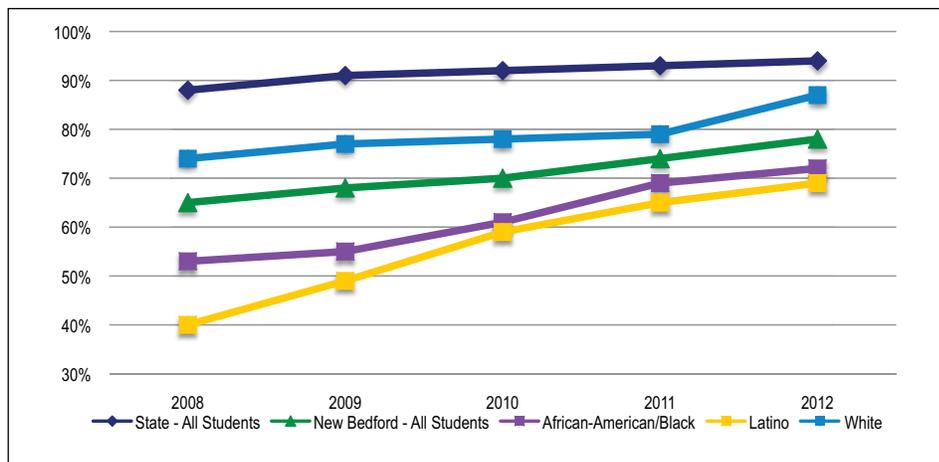Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*

Figure 10 illustrates that Latino students in New Bedford have the lowest Grade 10 STE MCAS tests pass rate among all ethno-racial groups in the district, with 69% passing the STE tests (i.e., scoring at "Needs Improvement" or higher). This pass rate was 18 percentage points below the rate for White students and 25 percentage points below the statewide rate for all students. However, the Grade 10 STE pass rate for Latino students in New Bedford has increased by 29 percentage points since the introduction of the test in SY2008. As seen in Figure 11 below, this improvement has reduced the gap with White students in New Bedford by 28% and the gap with all students statewide by 48%.
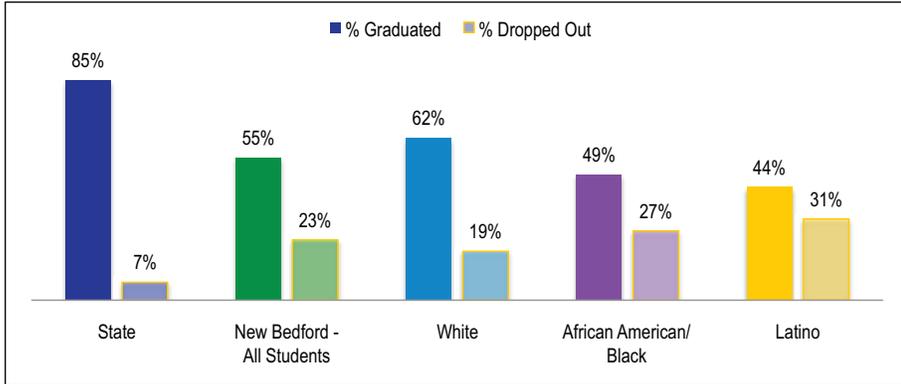
Figure 11: Percentage of Students Scoring "Needs Improvement" or Higher, Grade 10 STE MCAS, SY2008–SY2012

Source: MADESE (2012). *2012 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.*
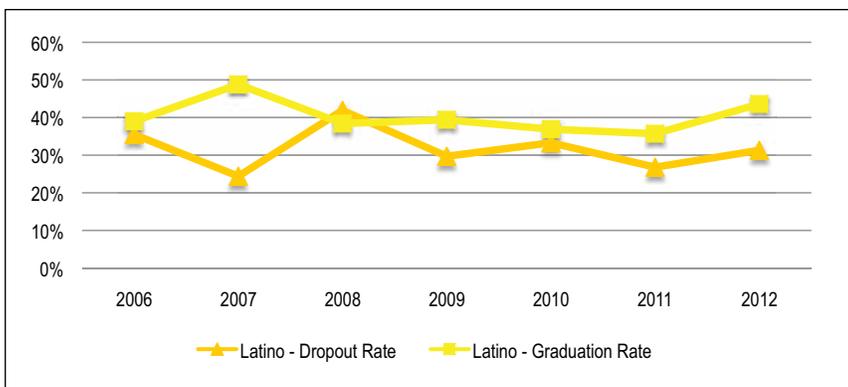
Graduation and Dropout Rates

Figure 12: Four-Year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, SY2012

Source: MADESE (n.d.). *Cohort 2012 Graduation Rates.*

As illustrated in Figure 12 above, New Bedford faces a major graduation and drop-out problem with only 55% of students graduating and nearly one-fourth (23%) dropping out within four years of beginning high school. These figures are far below the state graduation rate (85%) and far above the state dropout rate (7%). This problem is more severe among New Bedford's Latino students, who have the lowest four-year cohort graduation rate (44%) and the highest dropout rate (32%) of all ethno-racial groups in the district. Latino students also have the highest percentage of students who are still in school after four years, at 17%. This ethno-racial disparity in graduation and dropout rates is also seen statewide, where Latino students have the lowest graduation rate (66%) and highest dropout rate (18%) of all ethno-racial groups. Figure 13 below demonstrates that the four-year cohort outcomes for Latino students have improved over recent years, with the dropout rate decreasing from a high of 42% in SY2008 (a year when more students dropped out than graduated) and the graduation rate increasing from 39% in SY2006. Despite these modest improvements, the low graduation rate and high dropout rate continue to be a problem for Latino students in New Bedford.

Figure 13: Four-Year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rate, SY2006–SY2012

Source: MADESE (n.d.). *Cohort 2012 Graduation Rates.*

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Figure 14: Percentage of High School Graduates Attending Higher Education Institutions within 16 Months of Completing High School, SY2010
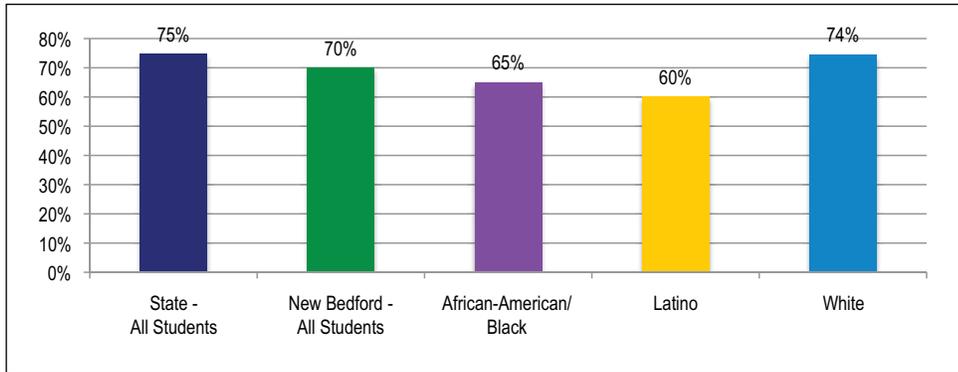
Source: MADESE. (n.d.). *2009-10 Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education All Colleges and Universities.*

As illustrated in Figure 14 Latino students in New Bedford have the lowest percentage of high school graduates attending higher education among all ethno-racial groups. Although 60% of Latino high school completers in SY2010 attended some form of higher education institutions within 16 months of completing high school, this percentage was approximately 15 points lower than both White students in New Bedford and all students statewide. Furthermore, over two-thirds of these college-attending Latino students were attending public two-year colleges (community colleges), a much higher proportion than for all other ethno-racial groups in New Bedford. Still, as Figure 15 shows, the Latino enrollment rate has increased by almost 12 percentage points since the state began tracking this information in SY2004.

Figure 15: Percentage of High School Graduates Attending Higher Education Institutions within 16 Months of Completing High School, SY2004 – SY2010
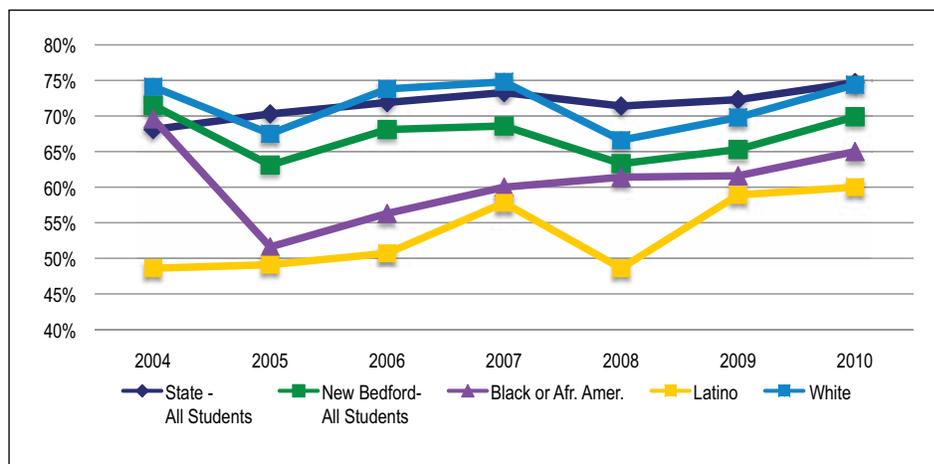
Source: MADESE. (n.d.). *2009-10 Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education All Colleges and Universities.*

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy conducts research on and for the Latino population in New England. Our goal is to generate the information and analysis necessary to develop more inclusive public policy, and to improve Latino participation in the policy making process. As part of its effort to present vital information about Latinos to diverse audiences, the Gastón Institute has produced this series of demographic and educational profiles for selected cities and towns. Reports can be downloaded from www.gaston.umb.edu.

Latinos in Public Schools is a series of reports based on publicly available data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (www.profiles.doe.mass.edu). The public school system in Massachusetts reflects the demographic shift in the diversity of the entire population. The total student enrollment has decreased over the past ten years, but during this period the state has witnessed a growing population of Latino students both in terms of overall enrollment and in proportion of total enrollment. Since the SY2006 school year, the number of Latino students in Massachusetts has increased by 25% (from 125,436 to 156,883

students) representing almost a 4-percentage-point increase in the proportion of total student enrollment (from 12.9% to 16.4% of all students) (MDESE, 2012, MA Enrollment). In contrast, during the same period the number of White and African-American/Black students has decreased by 14% and 5% respectively. This growing Latino population in the state is experiencing an achievement gap as compared to White students. They face persistently lower pass rates on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the state-required standardized tests. In addition, Latino students experience the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate as compared to other ethno-racial groups in the state. The growing Latino student population in many Massachusetts school districts presents these districts with a changing configuration of students and with new challenges and opportunities. We hope that this series of reports will be helpful, both to school officials and to the Latino communities of these cities and towns.

About the Author

Michael Berardino holds a M.S. in Public Policy from University of Massachusetts Boston and is currently a Research Associate at the Gastón Institute and a doctoral candidate in Public Policy at UMass Boston's McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies. His research focuses on the impacts of language instruction and high-stakes testing policies on English Language Learners, with special attention to Latino student outcomes, school discipline, and civic engagement.

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