

University of Massachusetts Boston

## ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

---

Gastón Institute Publications

Gastón Institute for Latino Community  
Development and Public Policy Publications

---

Summer 2001

### Latino Students in Boston: An Educational Profile

Miren Uriarte

*University of Massachusetts Boston*, [miren.uriarte@umb.edu](mailto:miren.uriarte@umb.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Uriarte, Miren, "Latino Students in Boston: An Educational Profile" (2001). *Gastón Institute Publications*. 147.

[https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs/147](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/147)

This Fact Sheet is brought to you for free and open access by the Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy Publications at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gastón Institute Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@umb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@umb.edu).



### Now Available First in Series of Fact Sheets on Education in Massachusetts

Having an impact on public policy requires that groups and communities be able to understand and manage information. But it is often the case that data and information that can be useful to community action is not accessible or understandable. Since 1992, when the 1990 census data became available, the Gastón Institute has developed data profiles of each city and town with significant Latino population in an effort to bridge this important aspect of the information gap facing Latino communities in the state. The feedback from community leaders and organizations about these data profiles led us to use a similar approach in the dissemination of information on the education of Latinos.

With financial support from the National Council of La Raza, the Gastón Institute is developing educational profiles for the fifteen Massachusetts school districts with the highest Latino student enrollment. The profiles include basic data on enrollment, MCAS results, and dropout rates that are routinely provided by school systems. The information will be provided to parents and community leaders in both English and Spanish to facilitate their effective participation in the public debate on school reform and its impact on Massachusetts students.

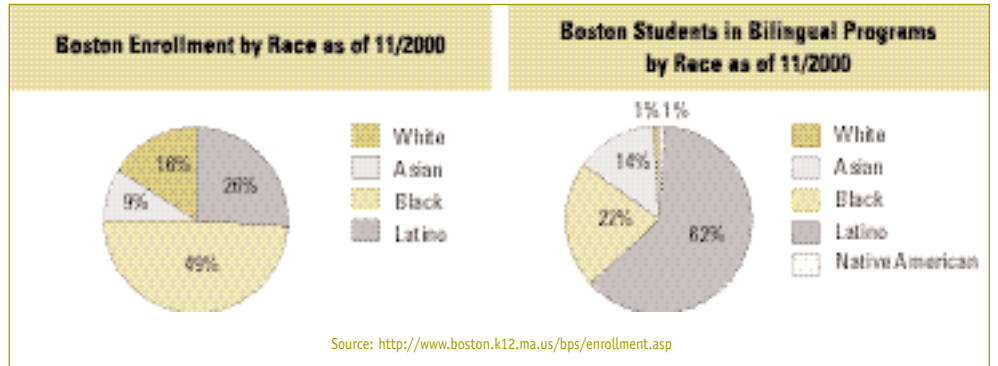
— Miren Uriarte

## Latino Students in Boston: An Educational Profile

### Enrollment

Boston is the largest school district in the state, with a total enrollment of 63,173 students in 2000. At that time, Latinos made up 26% of the total number of students, or 16,922 students, second only to black children in numbers. Boston has the largest number of Latino students of any district in the state.

In Boston, one third of all Latino students are enrolled in bilingual education. They are the largest language group of English language learners in the Boston schools. Sixty percent of all bilingual education students are Latino.

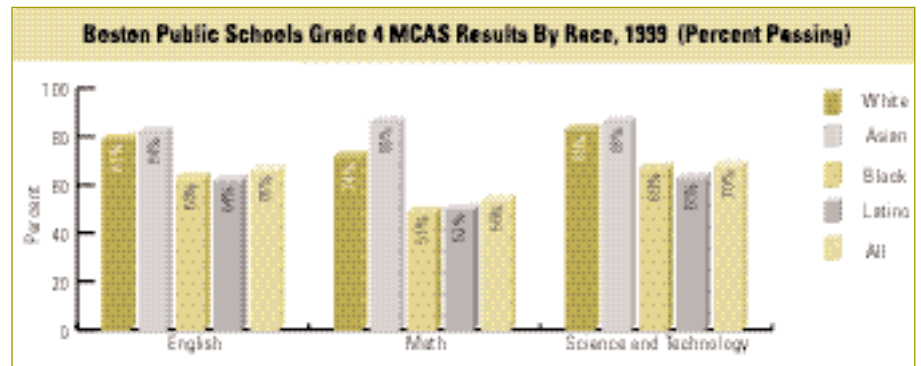


### Student Achievement

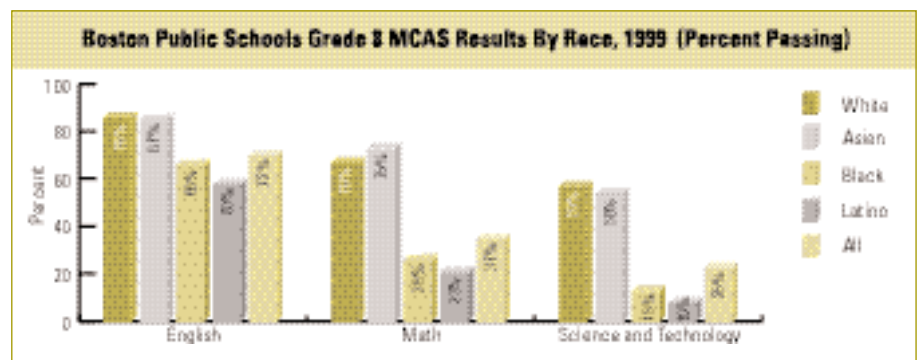
The primary measure of achievement established by the state of Massachusetts is the MCAS (the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System). This test has so far been given to students in 4th, 8th and 10th grade, but in the future may be given to children in other grades. The test is designed to measure student achievement in English language arts, math and science and technology. The Department of Education reports the results of the tests using four categories: advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. This year (2001), students in the 10th grade must score above failing in English language arts and math in order to graduate from high school.

The MCAS test has been offered every year since 1998. In the set of figures in this section we present the information on how different groups of children did in the 1999 MCAS tests in the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades. This is the most recent set of MCAS results available that provides data on children from different racial groups.

Most 4th graders in Boston passed the MCAS tests in 1999. Children did better in the science and technology and in the English language arts tests than in math. In all subject areas, the percentage of black and Latino children that passed the test was much lower than the percentage of white and Asian children. For example in math, 74% of white children passed, compared with only 52% of Latinos.



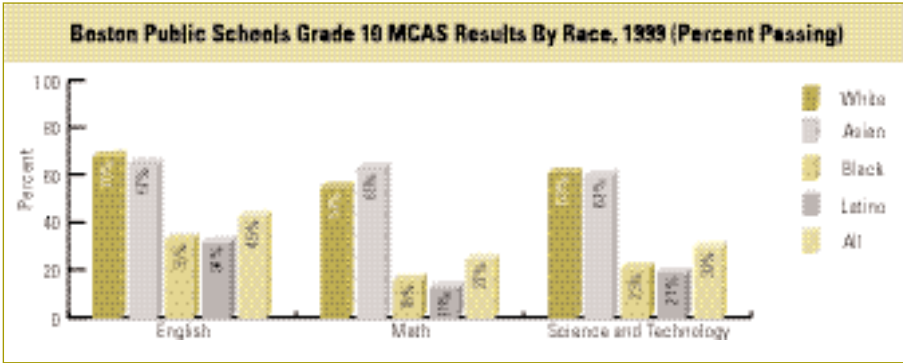
In the 8th grade, children generally did better in English language arts than they did in the 4th grade, but they did much worse in math and science and technology. In the 8th grade, 37% of all children passed the math test, compared with 56% in the 4th grade.



Although the percentage of children passing the test in the 8th grade is lower than it is in the 4th grade for all racial groups, the differences among the groups become more pronounced. In math, while 69% of the white children in Boston passed the test, only 23% of the Latinos did so. Latino 8th graders have the lowest rates of passing of all groups in all three subjects.

Boston 10th graders of all racial groups had the lower rates of passing than 4th and 8th graders. They performed best in English language arts and worst in math. Forty-five percent passed the English language arts test and only 27% of Boston 10th graders passed the math exam. This is important because all stu-

Source of 1999 MCAS Results pages 6 and 7: Report of 1999 Massachusetts and Local School District MCAS Results by Race/Ethnicity, Massachusetts Department of Education, May 2000.

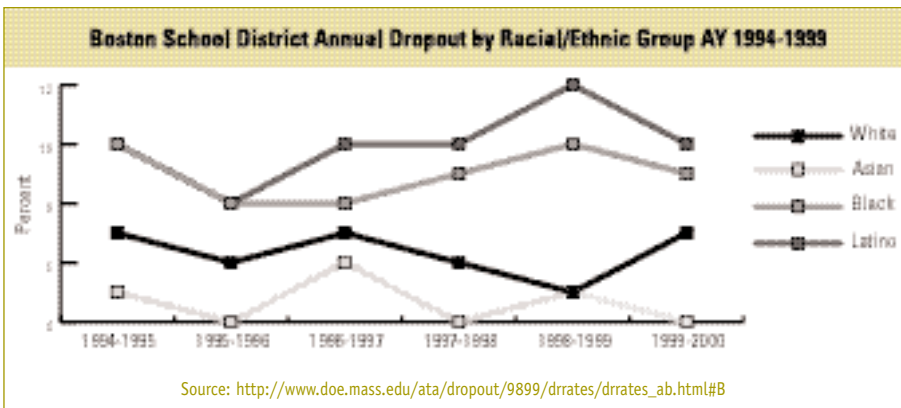


dents must pass the 10th grade English and math sections of the test to graduate from high school. The fact that students must pass this one test in order to graduate makes the MCAS a "high-stakes test," which means that there are strong consequences ("stakes") attached to the students' performance in this one test.

As in the 8th grade, Latino students have the lowest rates of passing of any group. Only 15% of Latino 10th graders passed the math test, compared with 57% of white children; in English language arts, 34% of Latino children passed the test compared with 70% of white children.

### Student Dropout Rate

The annual dropout rate indicates how many students left school for reasons other than transferring to another system in the course of a year. This is an important measure to monitor because it indicates how well students do in school and how comfortable they are in the school setting. Historically, Latinos have had very high dropout rates compared with other groups. This may be due to the need for children to work and the fact that schools may not present a very welcoming environment for Latino children.



Looking at the trend in the annual dropout rates by racial group in Boston, we see that Latino children have the highest rates of dropout of any group. Data for 2000 show an improvement in the dropout rates of black, Latino, and Asian children. In that year, 10% of the Latino high school students dropped out of school, compared with 9% of black, 7% of white and 4% of Asian students.

Paying attention to the dropout rates is particularly important when students are exposed to a "high stakes" test such as the MCAS. Research in other areas of the country that use "high-stakes" tests such as the MCAS have shown that students who feel vulnerable to failing the test may abandon school altogether rather than be exposed to failure. This leads to an increase in the dropout rate. Because of the problems Latino children are having doing well on the MCAS, they are more vulnerable to dropping out of school.

### Student Aspirations

If Latino students continue to fail the MCAS at the current rates, the majority will not be able to graduate from high school or continue their education in college. This realization is particularly sobering when contrasted with the aspirations of Latino students. In terms of their aspirations, Latino high school graduates are not that different from graduates from other racial/ethnic groups in the desire to go to college. Fifty-nine percent of Latino students graduating from high school in 1999 indicated that they wanted to attend college. Although there are some differences across race and ethnicity, the majority of students from every race aspire to go to college.



### Conclusion

Latino students are the second-largest group of students in the Boston school system. They are the group of children that appear to be most vulnerable, showing the lowest levels of school achievement and the highest rates of dropping out of school. There has been negligible improvement in MCAS scores for Boston Latinos in the three times the test has been offered. The improvement in the dropout rate in the last year will have to be monitored closely. Latino students, parents and community leaders as well as school officials have much to be concerned about the performance of Latino children in the Boston public schools.

### Resources

**Boston Parent Organizing Network**  
 50 Nightingale Hall  
 Northeastern University  
 Boston MA 02115  
 (617) 373-5922

**Massachusetts Advocacy Center (MAC)**  
 100 Boylston Street, Suite 200  
 Boston, MA 02116  
 (617) 357-8431

**BPS Parent Support Services Team**  
 Main Office  
 26 Court Street, 6th Floor  
 Boston, MA 02108  
 (617) 635-9660

**Multilingual Communication and Placement Center**  
 55 Malcolm X Blvd.  
 Roxbury, MA 02120  
 (617) 635-6547

**Title 1 Parent Resource Center**  
 445 Warren Street  
 Dorchester, MA 02121  
 (617) 635-7750

**Citywide Parents Council (CPC)**  
 21 Deakard Street  
 Boston, MA 02121  
 (617) 635-9210

