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## Latinos in Massachusetts: Springfield

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# Latinos in Massachusetts: Springfield

by Phillip Granberry, Ph.D., and  
Vishakha Agarwal, MPP

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THE MAURICIO GASTON INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY

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**Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Springfield**

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## Preface

The Mauricio Gastón Institute has published a city-specific sociodemographic report for Springfield since the 1990s. The 30-year collection of reports shows the gradual growth of the Latinx population into the largest ethnic group. This latest report shows that almost half of the city's population was Latinx at the end of 2019. The impact of this demographic trend on public policy dynamics is not only palpable locally but also statewide. In the 2020 elections, Springfield Latinx voters helped to send three Puerto Ricans to the Massachusetts Legislature, including the first Puerto Rican elected to the Senate, Senator Adam Gómez. Representative Orlando Ramos and Representative Carlos González were also elected to represent the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> districts in the House of Representatives. Together, they represent a third of the city's nine legislators in the Massachusetts Legislature. At the local level, Latinx representation in public policy bodies is lower. While there are three Puerto Ricans representing their wards, there is none among the five citywide positions in a City Council of 13 members. Of the two Puerto Ricans in a School Committee of eight members, one was elected for a citywide position, and the other represents two wards with a high concentration of Latinxs.

The current report adds more evidence on the social and economic indicators requiring the attention of policy makers, planners, and practitioners in Springfield. It is yet another call to city government agencies and institutions to respond to the data results. One sobering statistic that has persisted over time and it may reflect the city's inability to address Latinx equity in proportion to the size of the population, is employment opportunities for the college-educated. The percentage of Latinxs in Springfield (8%) is not only twice below the entire state (20%) but also lower than the figure for the city back in 2008 (9.3%). This statistic confirms the lived experience of many college-educated Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs who have moved to find employment opportunities in their professional fields elsewhere. Most city government departments have no Latinx representation in upper management and leadership. With a student population overwhelmingly Latinx (67%), the school system has only two Latina administrators within the Superintendent's Office. The lone Latina in a leadership position within City Hall has a dual role as the Election Commissioner and the City Clerk.

The old argument that there are no qualified Latinx professionals for upper management and leadership no longer holds true. Among the 1,300 Puerto Ricans who arrived to Springfield after the 2017 Hurricane Maria, there were college-educated professionals with at least a bachelor's degree and vast experience in education, public health and other fields who found jobs in other municipalities throughout Western and Central Massachusetts, as well as Connecticut. Springfield's need to reassess the city's employment policies and hiring patterns in response to the demographic changes is

clear. Implementing equity and inclusion policies in city government may also encourage the private sector to recruit and keep Latinxs at the upper levels of the employment ladder. Maintaining their talents, entrepreneurship spirit and spending power in the city ensures a better future for all.

A mindset of grit and resilience continues to inspire Latinx people to overcome the structural challenges that limit their opportunities to fully participate in the city's economic success. Their contribution to the cultural diversity and social fabric of the city is growing with each generation. Given the stratification of the past and current leadership, it is up to the new cohort of leaders to increase Latinx representation and influence in policies addressing equity and systemic barriers to social and economic justice in response to the current composition of the population.

***Maria Idalí Torres, PhD***

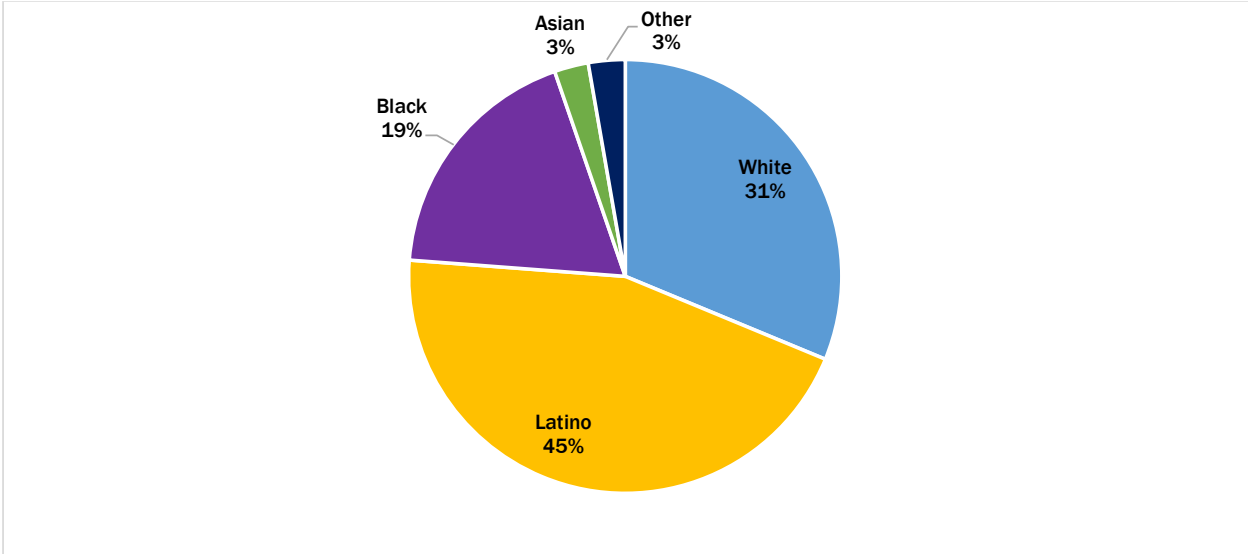
*Former director of the Gastón Institute*

Maria Idalí Torres is an applied public health anthropologist, retired professor from UMASS, and former director of the Gastón Institute. She lived in Springfield for over 30 years until the summer of 2017.

# Springfield Overview: The Latino Population

Springfield, the third largest city in Massachusetts, has 69,301 Latinos according to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey. They represent 45% of the city's population (Figure 1). Whites are the second largest ethno-racial group (31%), while Blacks (19%) and Asians (3%) are the other ethno-racial group with a sizable presence. The Latino share in Springfield is also larger than Latinos' statewide share, which is 11%.

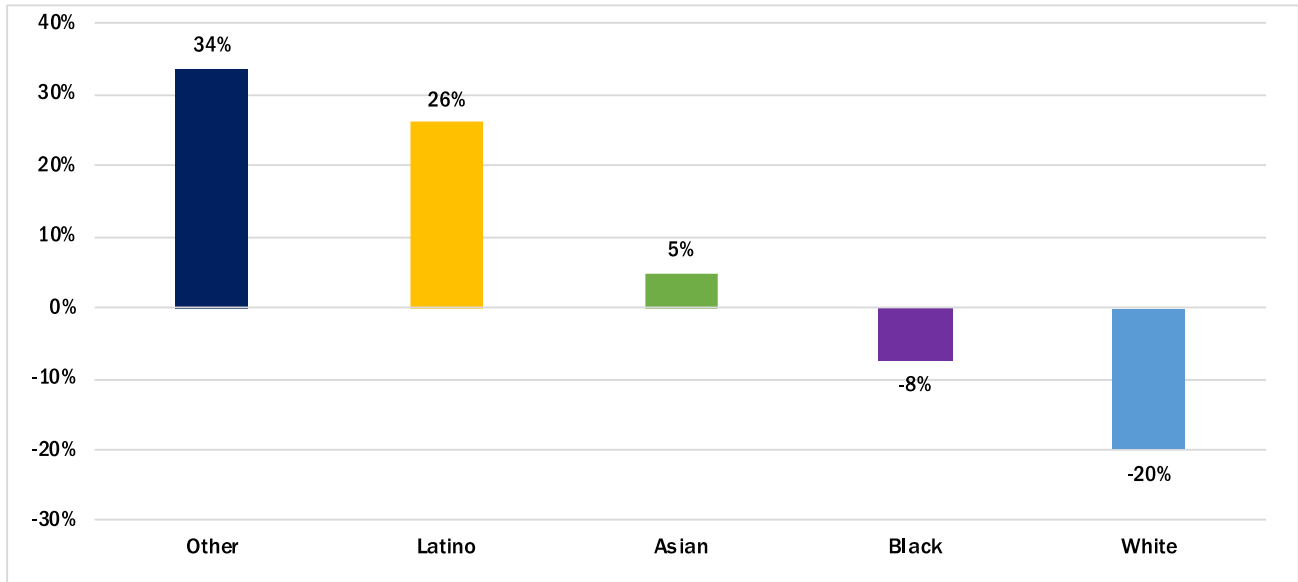
**Figure 1: Population Percentages by Ethno-Racial Group in Springfield**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B03003

A striking feature of Springfield is its changing composition of its population (Figure 2). Although the city's population increased by only 1% from 2010 to 2019, the Latino population increased by 26%. Meanwhile, the White population declined by 20% and the Black population by 8%. The growth of the Latino population in Springfield is less than that of Latinos statewide, who experienced an increase of 38% during this period.

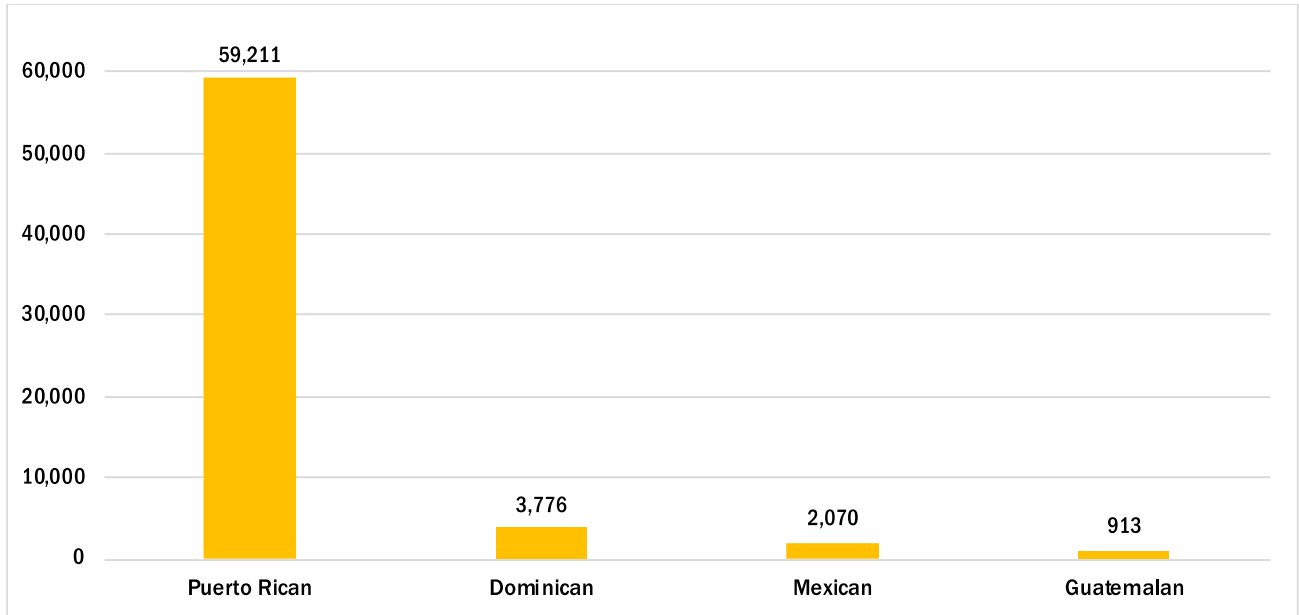
**Figure 2: Population Change by Ethno-Racial Group from 2010 to 2019**



Source: 2006-2010 & 2015-2019 American Community Surveys –B03003

The large Latino population is driven by the city's high concentration of Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens and who number 59,211. As a result, Springfield has a lower percentage of foreign-born residents (10%) than the state as a whole (17%). Dominicans (2,232) and Jamaicans (2,182) are the two largest foreign-born populations in Springfield. Only 7% of Latinos in Springfield are foreign-born and only 4.3% are not U.S. citizens. In addition to Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, Figure 3 shows that the next largest Latino population in the city consists of Mexicans, and Guatemalans. Statewide, the largest Latino populations are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, and Guatemalans.

**Figure 3: Origin of the Top Latino Groups**



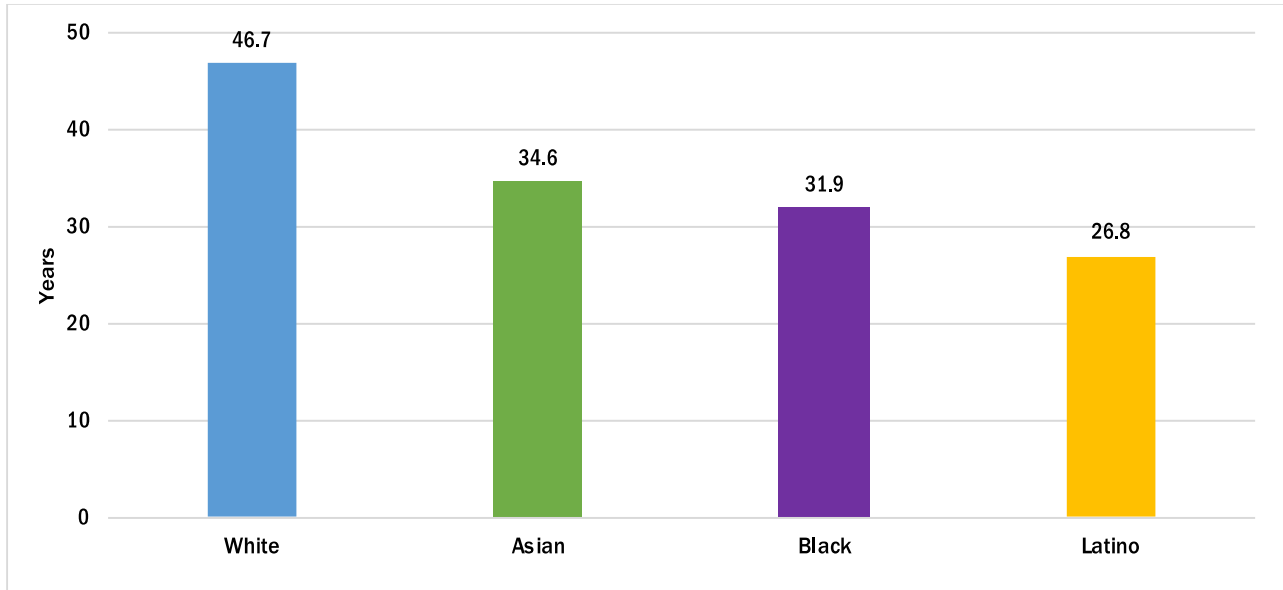
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B03003

### ***Median Age and Marital Status***

Age demographics vary significantly across ethno-racial groups in Springfield. Figure 4 shows differences in median age, drawing attention to the importance of Latinos in Springfield. Latinos have a median age (26.8 years) that is younger than the statewide Latino median (28.1 years) and much younger than the median age of Blacks (31.9 years), Asians (34.6 years), and Whites (46.7 years) in Springfield.



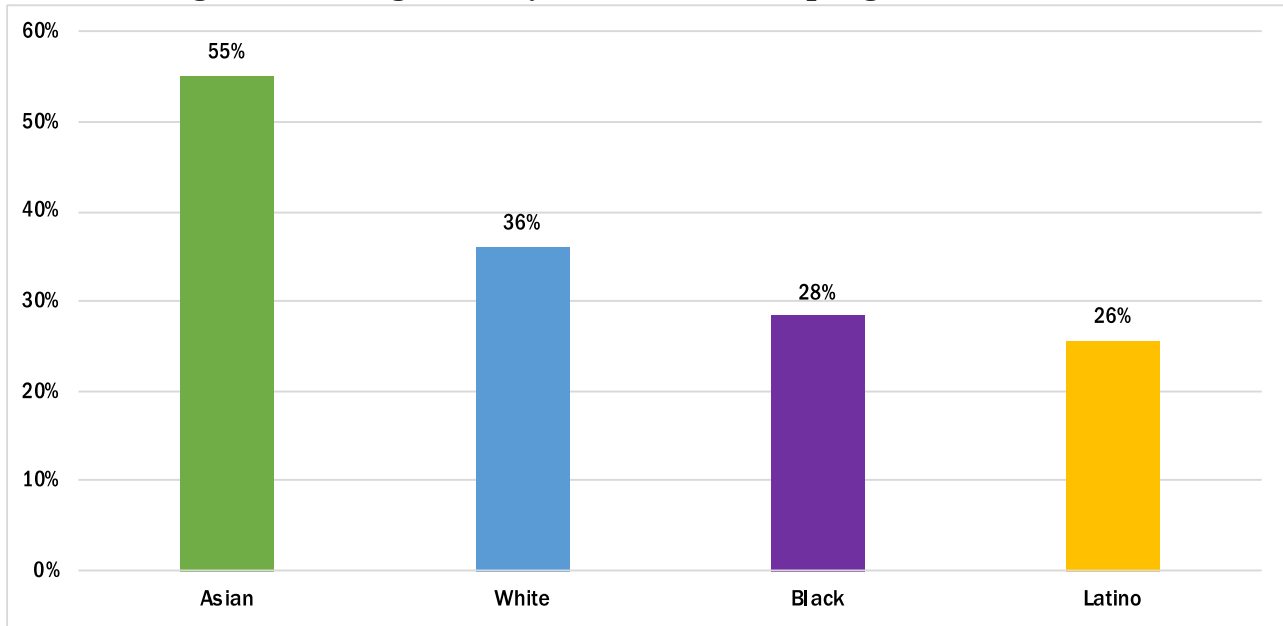
**Figure 4: Median Age by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B01002

The marriage rate in Springfield for persons 15 and over is 31% compared to 48% statewide. The youthfulness of Springfield's Latino population may influence its marital status. The Latino marriage rate of 26% shown in Figure 5 is lower than for all other populations in Springfield. Statewide, the Latino marriage rate is 32%.

**Figure 5: Marriage Rates by Ethno-Racial Group (Ages 15 and older)**

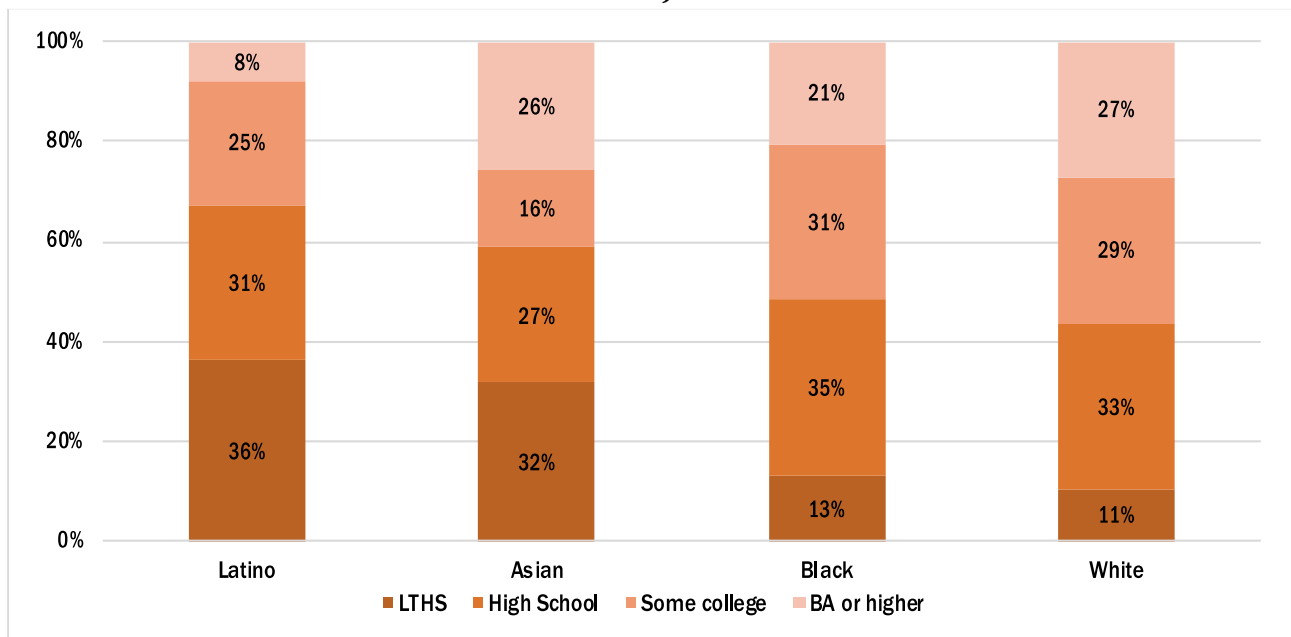


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B12001

## Education

Figure 6 highlights the fact that Latinos have a high share of their adult population lacking a high school diploma: 36%, compared to 11% for Whites, 13% for Blacks, and 32% for Asians. The statewide rate for Latinos lacking a high school diploma is 27%. At the other end of the educational scale, Latinos have the lowest share of their population with at least a Bachelor's degree: 8%, compared to 21% for Blacks, 27% for Whites, and 26% for Asians. Statewide, 20% of adult Latinos have at least a Bachelor's degree.

**Figure 6: Educational Attainment by Ethno-Racial Group in 2015 (Adults 25 years and older)**

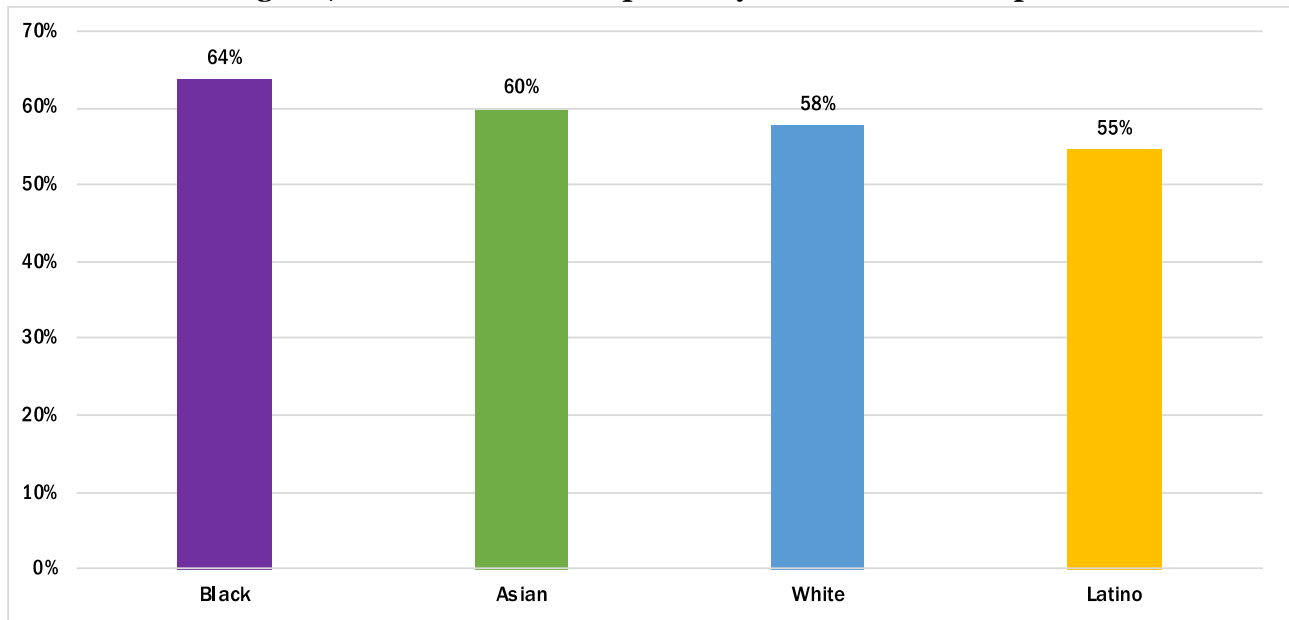


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - B15002

## Labor Force Participation

Figure 7 shows that Latinos have a lower labor force participation rate (55%) than Whites (58%), Asians (60%), and Blacks (64%). This labor force participation rate is substantially lower than the statewide Latino average of 67%, and slightly lower than the overall Springfield labor force participation rate of 58%. This low labor force participation in Springfield could be related to the lower median age of Latinos shown by Figure 4 and educational attainment shown by Figure 6, suggesting they have more families with young children, which typically aligns with lower labor force participation rates due to caretaking needs.

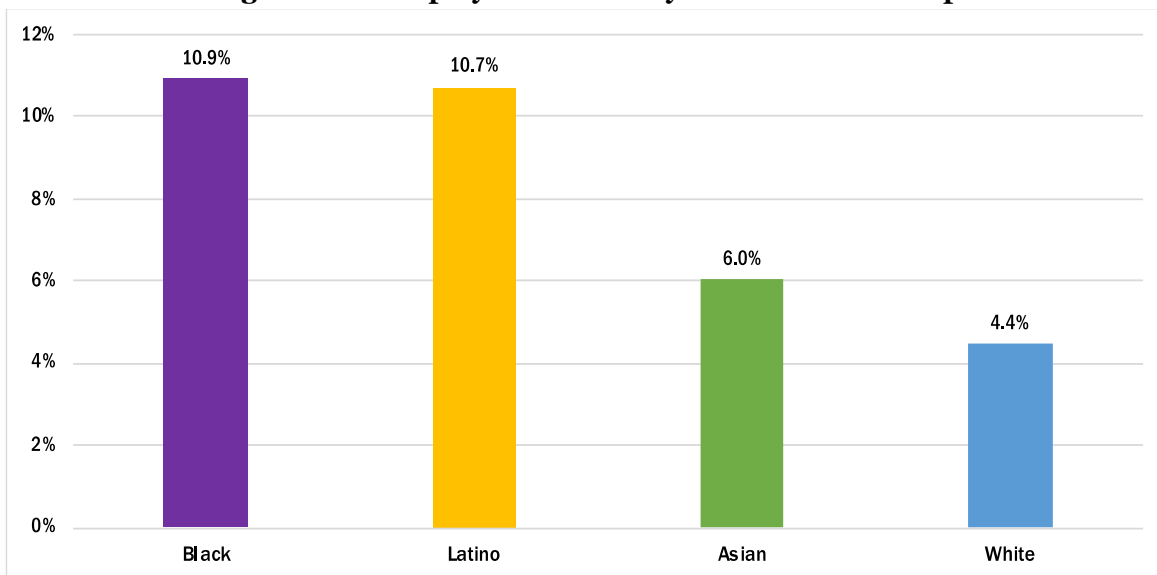
**Figure 7: Labor Force Participation by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - C23002

The previous labor force information suggests that Latinos in Springfield are struggling to participate in the city's economy. Figure 8 tells a similar and even less positive story for those Latinos who are in the work force. Unemployment in Springfield during this period was 4.7% overall but 10.7% for Latinos, which was more than double that of Whites (4.4%) in the city, and much higher than the statewide Latino unemployment rate of 6.0%.

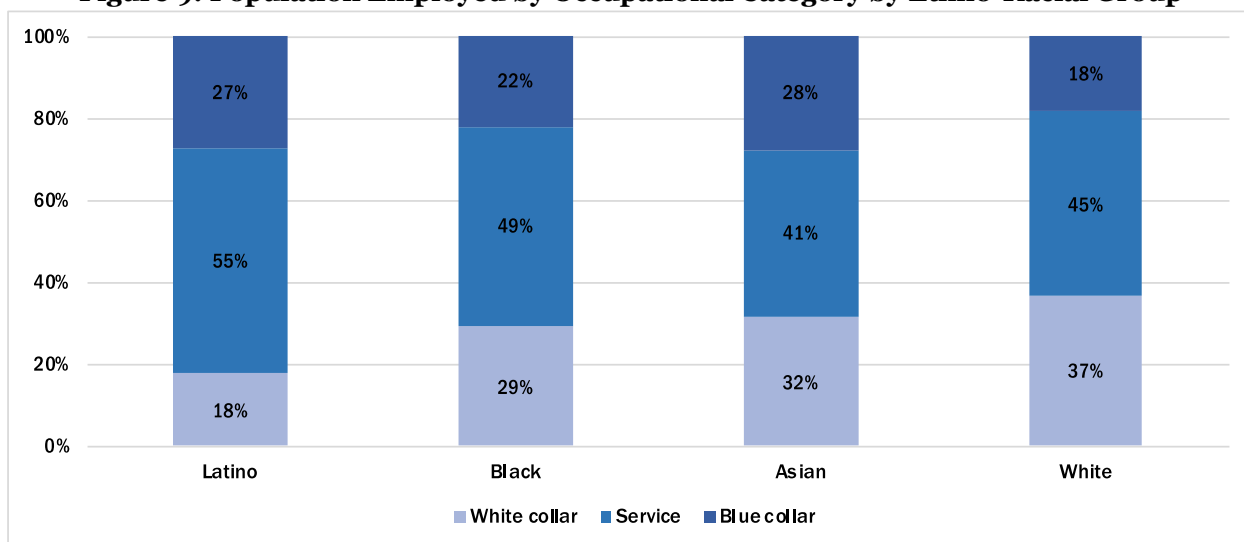
**Figure 8: Unemployment Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - C23002

Figure 9 suggests that Latinos serve as complements to other ethno-racial groups in the Springfield labor market whose members have higher educational attainment. Latinos are overrepresented in sales and service occupations (55%). Correspondingly, Latinos are underrepresented in what are traditionally considered white-collar jobs, consisting of professional and managerial occupations (18%) and blue-collar occupations (27%). Statewide 26% of Latinos work in white-collar jobs, 49% work in service jobs, and 25% work in blue collar jobs.

**Figure 9: Population Employed by Occupational Category by Ethno-Racial Group**

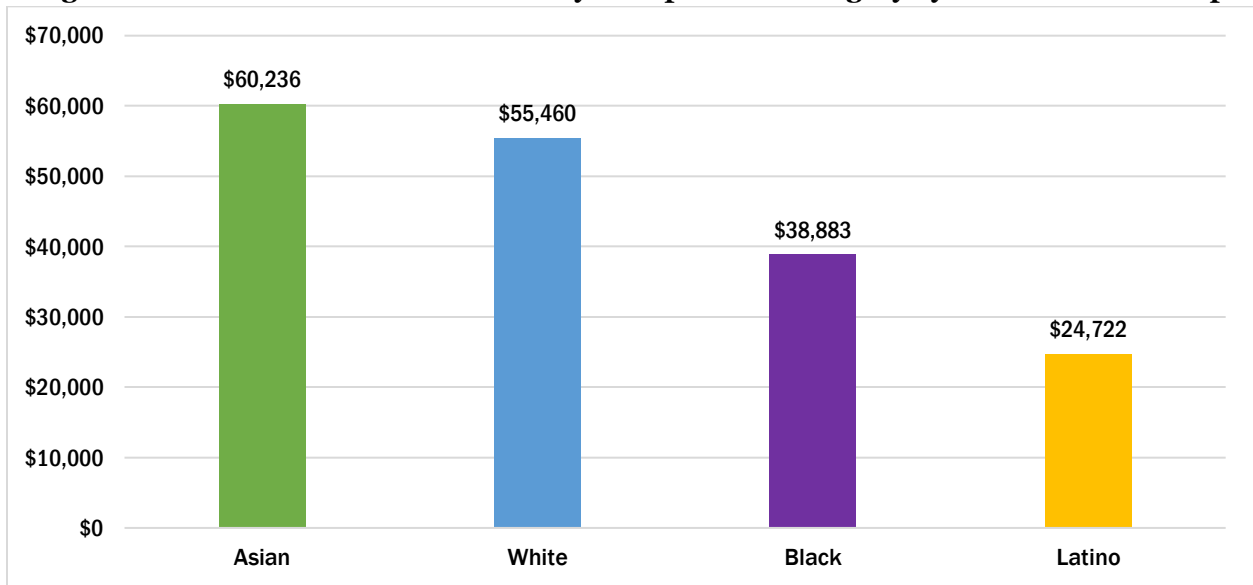


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - C23002

## ***Income***

Highlighting the economic problems that Springfield has experienced as a Gateway City in Massachusetts over the last several decades, the city's median household income is \$39,432, which is dramatically lower than the statewide median income of \$81,215. Latinos in Springfield have the lowest median household income (\$24,722) compared to the other ethno-racial groups in the city (Figure 10). Latinos in Springfield are more economically disadvantaged than Latinos in other parts of the Commonwealth, as the statewide Latino median household income is \$44,885.

**Figure 10: Median Household Income by Occupational Category by Ethno-Racial Group**

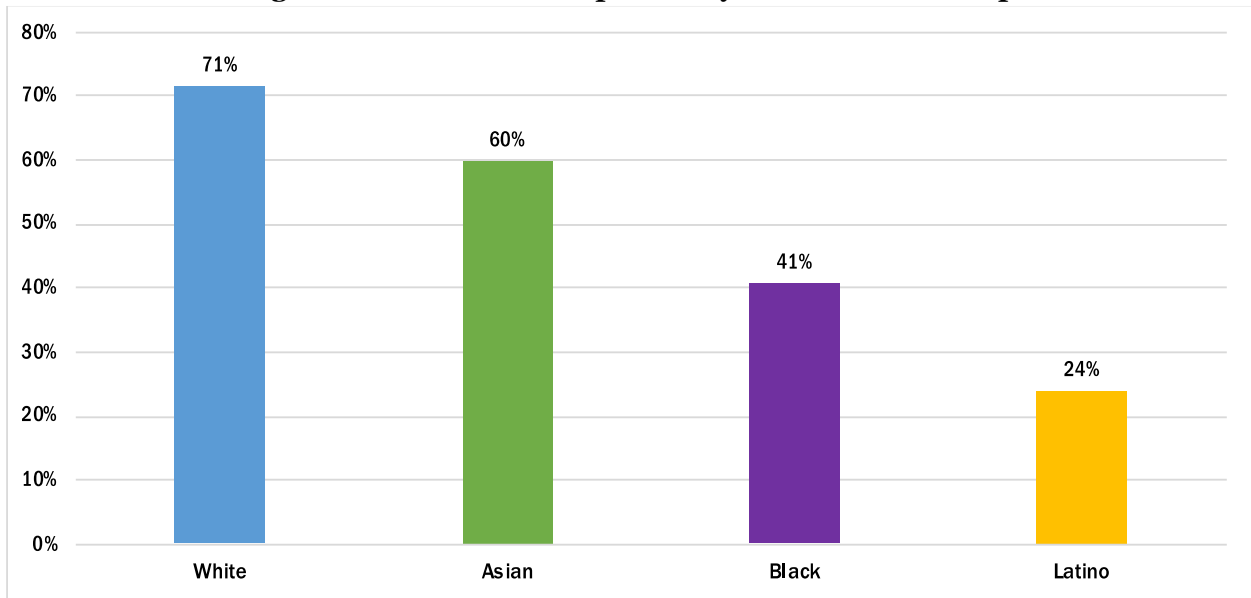


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - S1903

## ***Housing and Medical Insurance***

The final measures of Latino participation in Springfield are intended to identify how well they are being rewarded for their economic, social, and political participation. Latinos traditionally have low homeownership rates across the country. Figure 11 shows that this trend holds true for Springfield, where Latinos' homeownership level (24%) is lower than for other ethno-racial groups in the city. (It is also lower than the statewide Latino rate of 26%.)

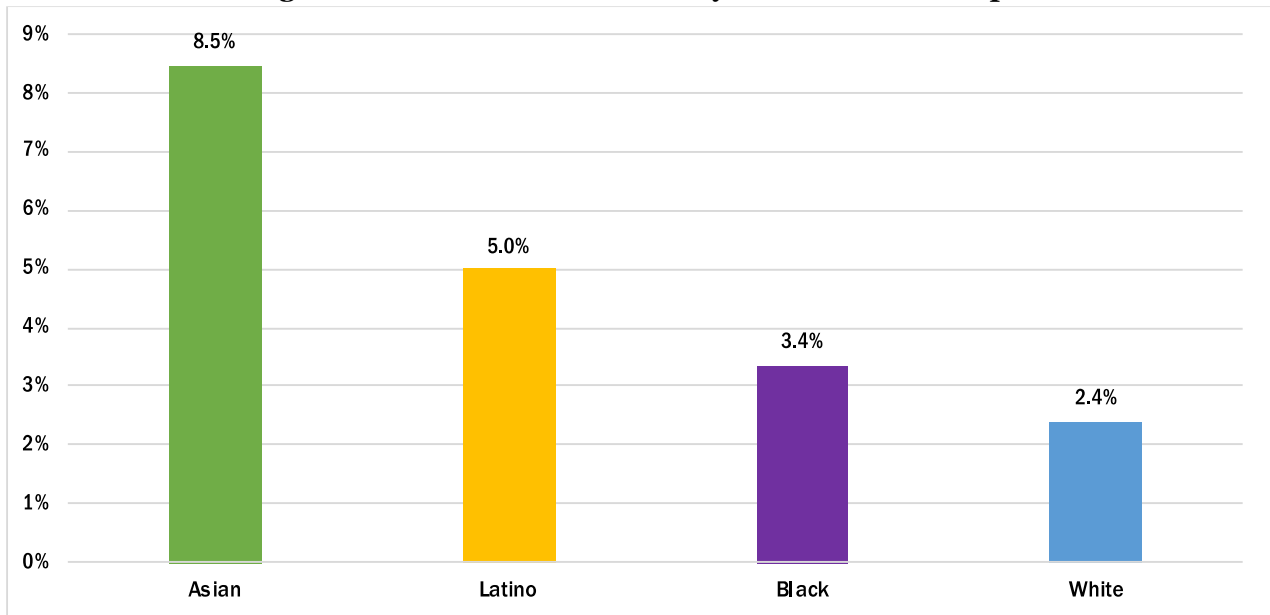
**Figure 11: Homeownership Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - B25003

Springfield's overall rate of medical uninsurance (3.7%) is higher than the statewide average of 2.7%. Figure 12 shows that Springfield's Latinos have 5.0% of their population uninsured. This is higher than for all other ethno-racial groups except Asians (8.5%). Statewide, the medical uninsurance rate among Latinos is 5.3%.

**Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance by Ethno-Racial Group**

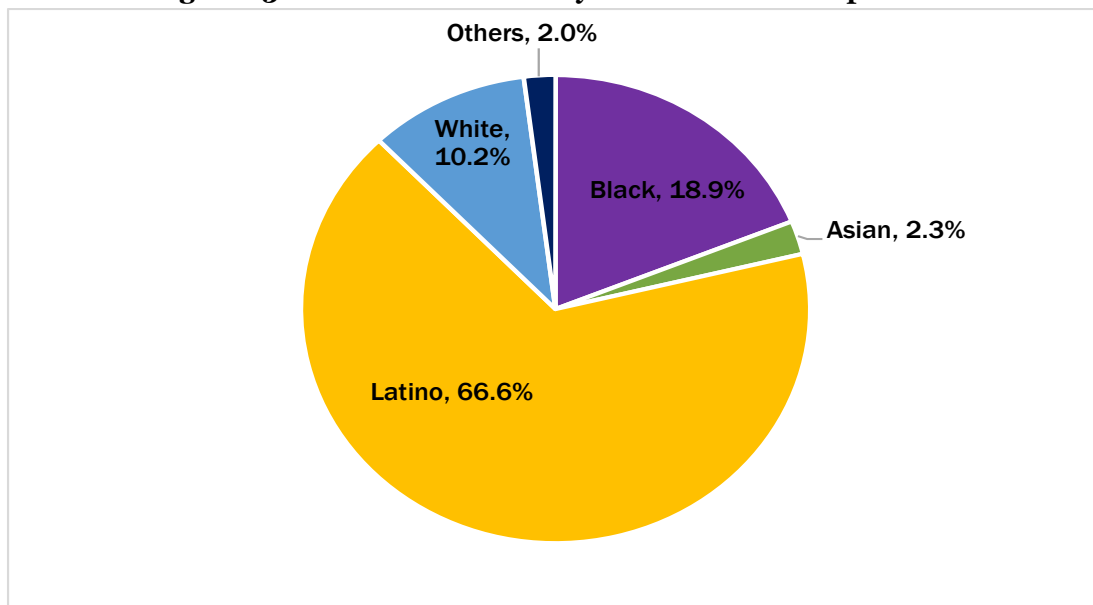


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - B27001

## ***Spotlight on Springfield Public Schools***

Springfield Public Schools are the focus of this next section. Springfield Public Schools enrolled 25,297 students in School Year 2018-2019. Latinos made up 66.6% of this school population (Figure 13), well above the statewide Latino student percentage of 20.8%. Blacks (18.9%) and Whites (10.2%) are the next largest ethno-racial groups in Springfield's public school population. These data are from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the School Year 2018-2019.

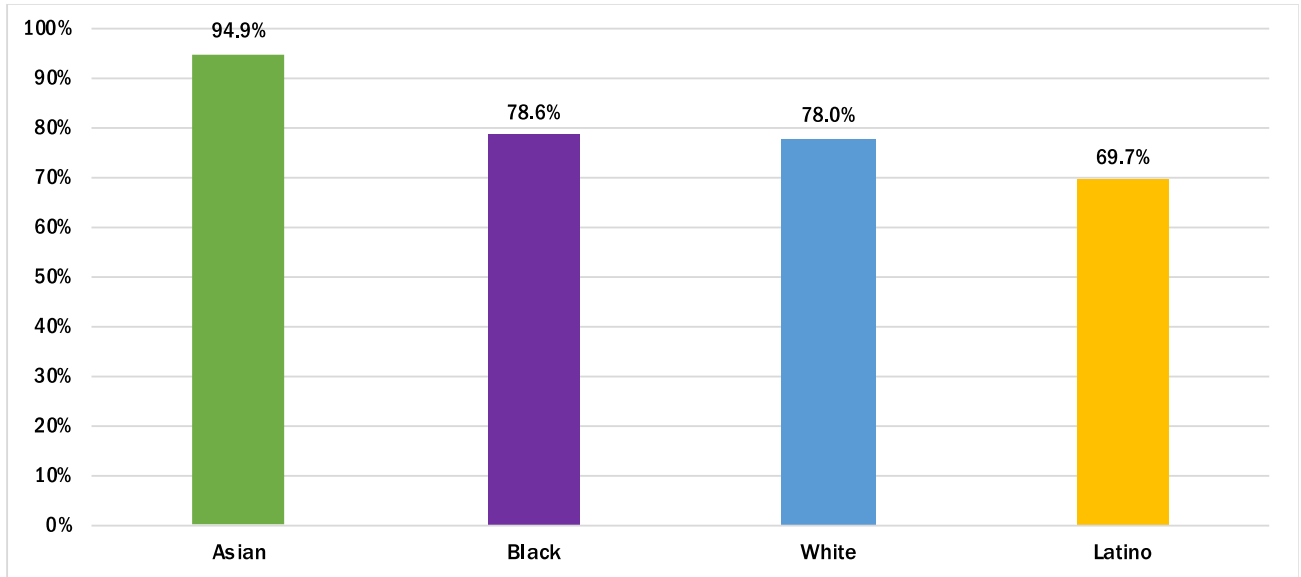
**Figure 13. School Enrollment by Ethno-Racial Composition**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Springfield Public Schools' four-year high school graduation rate in School Year 2018-2019 was 73.8%, notably lower than the state's rate of 88%. Latino students have the lowest graduation rate in the Springfield Public Schools, 70% (Figure 14).

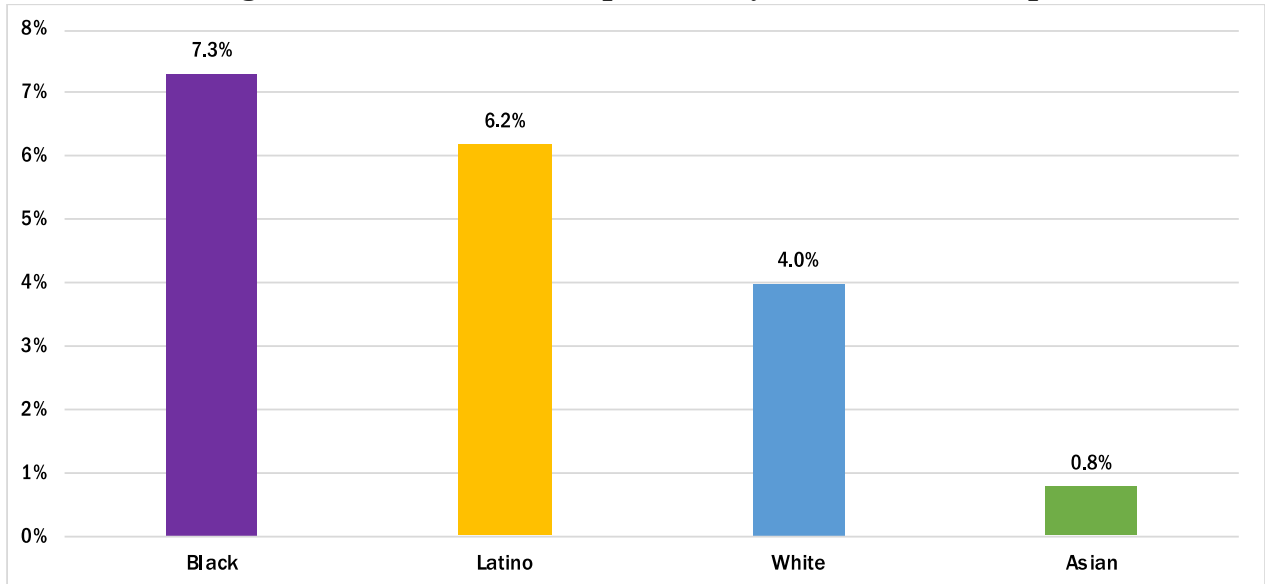
**Figure 14: Four-Year Graduation Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Springfield Public Schools' out-of-school suspension rate is 6.0%, twice the state's rate of 3.0%. Black and Latino students had the highest out of school suspension rate in School Year 2018-2019, 7.3% and 6.2% respectively (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Out-of-School Suspensions by Ethno-Racial Group**

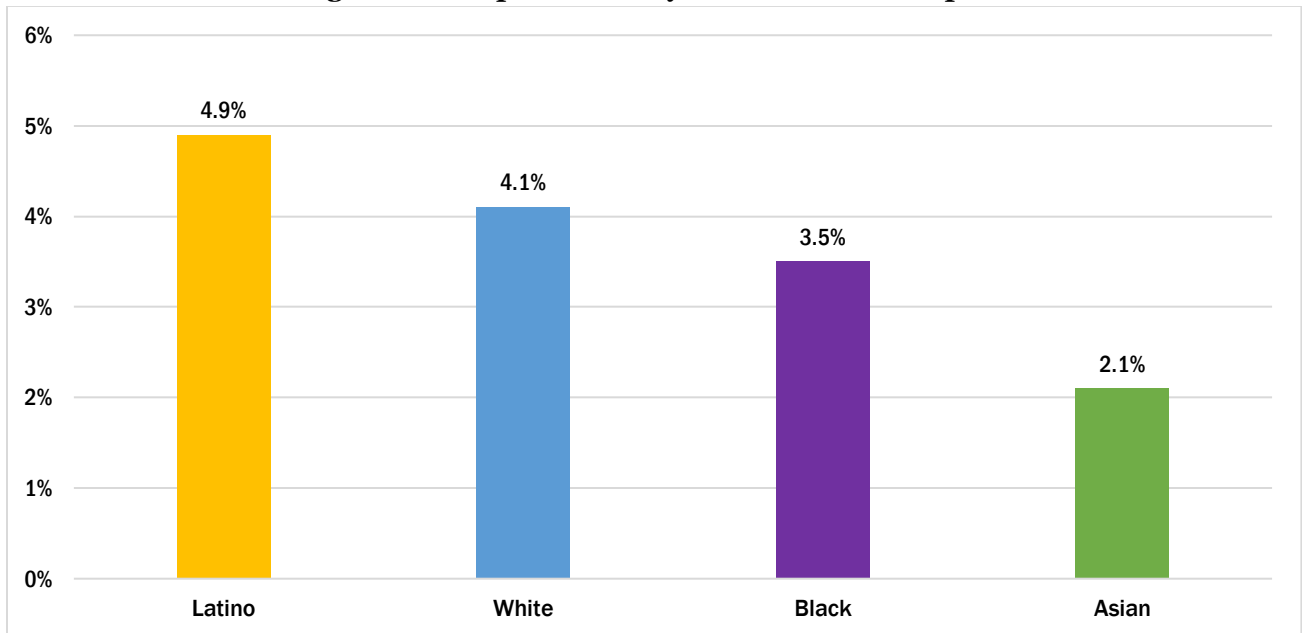


Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019



Springfield Public Schools' dropout rate is 4.4%, well above the state's rate of 1.8%. Latino students had the highest dropout rate in School Year 2018-2019, 4.9% (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Dropout Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**

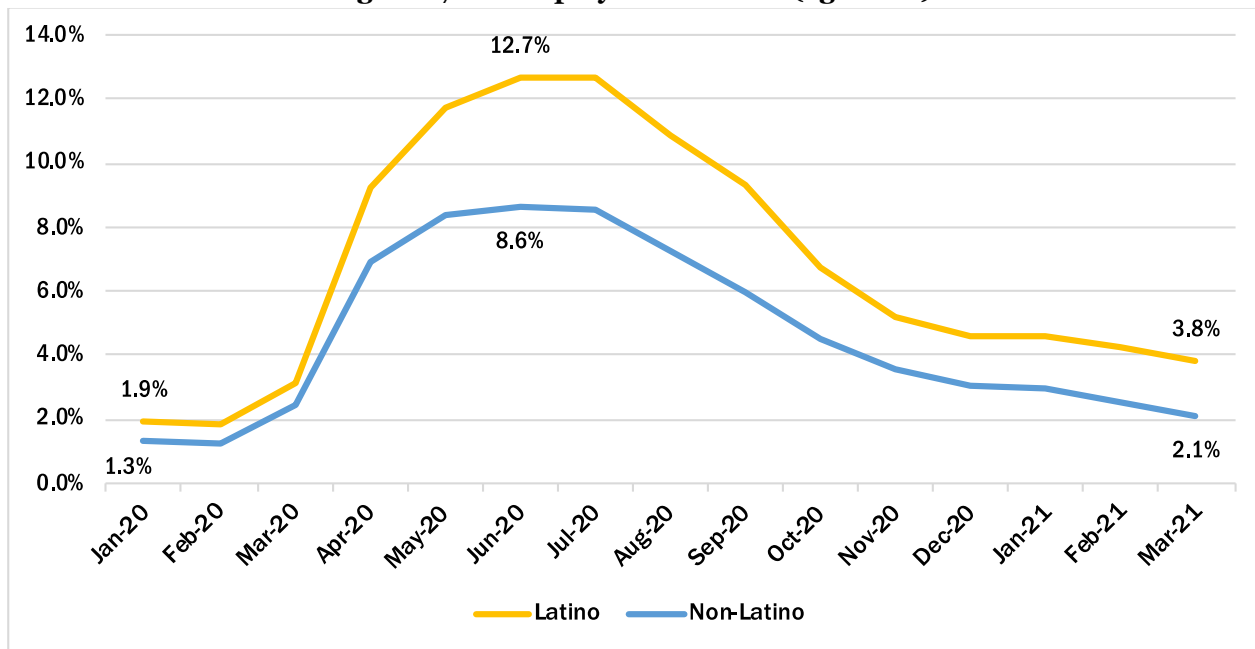


Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

### ***Impact of COVID-19***

Starting in March 2020, when COVID-19 hit Springfield, unemployment claims rapidly increased, from a low point of 1.9% for Latinos. In June 2020, both Latinos and non-Latinos filed high numbers of unemployment claims, their rates rising to 12.7% and 8.6%, respectively. (These percentages are calculated by dividing the number of reported claims by the population age 18 and older.) From that peak, there was a mostly steady decline in the unemployment claims among both groups, standing in March 2021 at 3.8% for Latinos and 2.1% for non-Latinos.

**Figure 17: Unemployment Claims (ages 18+)**



Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development

## About the Gastón Institute

Established in 1989, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was created by the Massachusetts Legislature in response to a need for improved understanding about the Latino experience in the commonwealth. Now in its 30th year, the Gastón Institute continues its mission of informing the public and policymakers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and providing information and analysis necessary for effective Latino participation in public policy development. To learn more about the Gastón Institute, visit [www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute).

One of the goals of the Gastón Institute is to be responsive to the needs of the Latino and policy communities through the research we undertake. Please feel free to contact us with suggestions or requests for specific information.

## About the Authors

Phillip Granberry worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy from UMass Boston. He has published several articles on the accumulation and use of social capital among Latinos and the sexual health communication of Puerto Rican mothers with their children. In addition to his research and teaching in the Gastón Institute and Economics Department at UMass Boston, he is Senior Researcher in demography for the Boston Planning and Development Agency.

Vishakha Agarwal is a Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy in the McCormack Graduate School at UMass Boston. Vishakha's research focuses on children's everyday classroom experiences, well-being, and education. Her dissertation examines how interactions between teachers and students and among students impact students' classroom experiences and, in turn, informs their subjectivity. She also holds a Bachelor's of Science (Research) in Economics from Shiv Nadar University, India, and a Master's of Science in Public Policy from UMass Boston.



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