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## The State of Latino Education: 2010-2020

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# **The State of Latino Education: 2010-2020**

**by Fabián Torres-Ardila &  
Nyal Fuentes**

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**UMass  
Boston**



**THE MAURICIO GASTON INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY**  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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# **The State of Latino Education: 2010-2020**

**Authors: Fabián Torres-Ardila & Nyal Fuentes**

## **Abstract**

In this report, we will provide a descriptive analysis of the main trends in educational achievement for Latinos in Massachusetts in the period 2010-2022. We highlight areas in which Latino students have made considerable progress since the publication of the 2010 Gastón report “The State of Latinos and Education in Massachusetts: 2010,” along with other areas in which progress has stalled and/or been reversed. The data presented cover only until 2020, before the full effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were felt. We end with recommendations for further development of a Latino Education agenda.

## **Introduction**

There is no dispute that Massachusetts is one of the U.S. states leading the nation in student achievement. For example, Massachusetts fourth and eighth graders scored on top among all U.S. states in reading and mathematics on the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam.<sup>1</sup> However, in 2022, as in 2010 when the first report on the “State of Latinos and Education in Massachusetts”<sup>2</sup> appeared, the state is leaving its Latino<sup>3</sup> students behind. Despite progress shown across various measures, Latino students are still

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts. “Massachusetts NAEP Results Lead Nation for 12th Year.” Accessed March 21, 2022. <https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-naep-results-lead-nation-for-12th-year>.

<sup>2</sup> Billie Gastic, Melissa Colón,; and Andrew Flannery Aguilar, “The State of Latinos and Education in Massachusetts: 2010.” [http://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs/160](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/160)

<sup>3</sup> Although the term “Latinx” (pronounced La-teen-ex, Latinks, or Latin-equis in Spanish) has recently emerged to refer to people of Latin American descent as a broad and more inclusive term for Hispanics, its use has remained controversial and rare among this population. In this report, the authors have decided to use the terminology that is currently used to gather the state and school data presented and use Latino or Hispanic interchangeably to refer to this group.

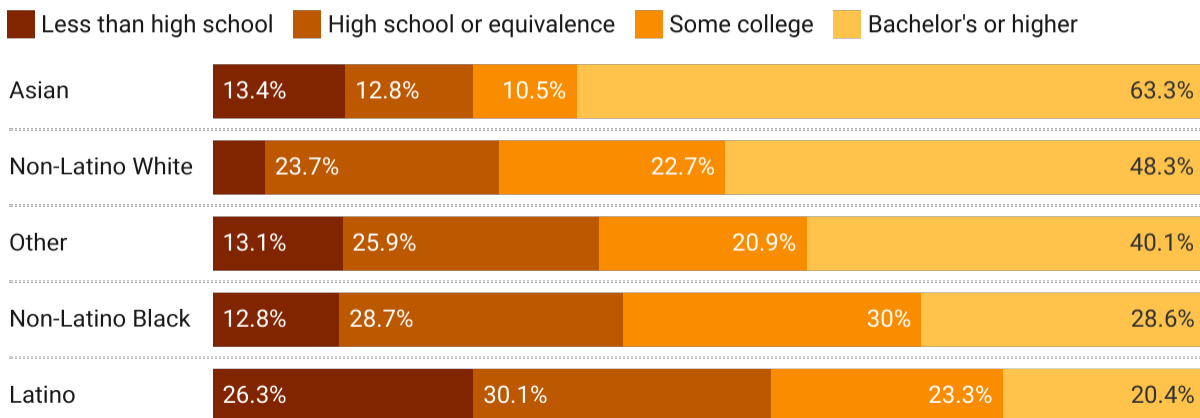
displaying huge gaps with respect to other student groups, particularly Asian and White students.

Latino students are struggling at all levels – in elementary, middle, and high school, with a consequent impact on college enrollment and retention. The cumulative effects of this are seen in low levels of postsecondary enrollment and completion for the Latino population (Figure 1). On average, Latinos have lower levels of formal education than other groups in the Commonwealth. For example, 88% of Asians aged 25 years or older in the Commonwealth have at least a high school diploma, compared to 73.7% of Latinos. Even starker is the contrast among those with a bachelor’s degree or more. Asian and non-Latino White residents 25 years or older have the highest rates of bachelor’s degree or more, at 63.3% and 48.3% respectively, whereas for Latinos the rate is only 20.4%. This situation impacts the access of Latinos to the high-paying jobs for which the state is well known.

Figure 1. Educational attainment of Massachusetts residents 25 years of age or older

### Educational Attainment in MA by Race and Ethnicity

Indicates the highest degree or the highest level of school completed by MA residents. Includes all people age 25+ because not all students earn their degrees in 4 years after high school.



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey, Gastón Institute Analysis • Created with Datawrapper

The 2020 census confirmed that Latinos are the largest and second fastest growing

racial/ethnic population in the Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> Latinos call all parts of Massachusetts their home. While established communities continue to grow, many new and “emerging” Latino neighborhoods – and school districts – are taking shape. About one-fifth of all students in Massachusetts’ public schools are Latino (DESE, “District Enrollment Rates,” 2020). Relative to other groups, Latinos are a young population, and are therefore enrolled in the public schools at rates above their share of the population. Educational reforms at the state and federal levels that have aimed to improve the educational outcomes of all students have struggled to sufficiently improve results for Latino students.

This report compiles the most recent publicly available data on Latinos and education in the Commonwealth. The data presented in this report were derived from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the U.S. Department of Education. We describe patterns of growth in the Latino population in the Commonwealth and its public schools using census data as well as American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 data. We also examine data on several indicators of Latino students’ academic success: achievement, disciplinary actions, dropping out, high school graduation, college enrollment, and achievement on standardized tests. Throughout the report, we highlight student outcomes in select public school districts with large Latino enrollments. When possible, we establish comparisons across measures used in the 2010 report referenced above.

The “elephant in the room” is Covid-19. Of course, the “pre-Covid” data presented do not consider the effect of the pandemic on education in Massachusetts and particularly not the outsized effect of the virus on communities with large Latino populations. It was not our intent to ignore these issues, but because of the unusual conditions that the pandemic created for the gathering of educational data, we decided that the data gathered during the pandemic were not appropriate to establish trends. However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on educational progress will be a critical arena for future research as we begin to address the unfinished

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<sup>4</sup> Census Bureau. “Decennial Census of Population and Housing by Decades.” Accessed March 1, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.2020.html.html>

learning and the need for acceleration for many of our learners in the near future.

## **Latino Public-School Enrollment in Massachusetts**

According to the 2020 Census, Latinos represent 12.3% of the population of the Commonwealth.<sup>5</sup> While the Commonwealth's overall population grew by a modest 7.4% from 2010 to 2020, its Latino population grew by 41.4% in the same period. This makes Latinos the second fastest growing population in Massachusetts, trailing only Asians and Pacific Islanders, whose numbers grew by 45.3% over the same period. By 2030, Latinos will account for 15% of the Commonwealth's residents.<sup>6</sup> Latinos are a young population, and about one-third (33.5%) of them are school-aged (between the ages of 5 and 17), compared to 20.2% of the Commonwealth's overall population. However, there are major differences in the share of school-aged Latino across the state. For example, some small cities have very few Latino children, while in Chelsea 71% of all children are Latino.

There were 948,828 students in the Commonwealth's public schools in the 2019-2020 school year (AY2020). This represented a small decline of less than 1% (or 8,225 students) since AY2010 (2009-2010) (DESE, "District Enrollment Rates," 2020). The Commonwealth has 400 operating school districts, including 78 charter schools and 25 educational collaboratives. Of its 1,840 public schools, 60% are elementary schools, 18% are middle/junior high schools, and 20% are high schools (DESE, "District Enrollment Rates," 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Table 1: Change of enrollment by race/ethnicity from AY 2010 to AY2020

### Change of Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

The table shows change in the share of enrollment from AY2010 to AY2020 by race and ethnicity with the corresponding annualized growth for each group.

Race/Ethnicity	2010	2020	Annualized Growth
Asian	50,801 (5.3%)	67,527 (7.1%)	2.9%
Black	78,044 (8.2%)	87,053 (9.2%)	1.1%
<b>Latino/Hispanic</b>	<b>141,933 (14.8%)</b>	<b>205,136 (21.6%)</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
Multi-race	21,365 (2.2%)	37,244 (3.9%)	5.7%
Native American	2,532 (0.3%)	2,081(0.2%)	-1.9%
Pacific Islander	1,086 (0.1%)	781 (0.1%)	-3.2%
White	661,292 (69.1%)	549,006 (57.9%)	-1.8%
All Students	957,053 (100%)	948,828 (100%)	-0.1%

Table: Gastón Institute. • Source: DESE. "Enrollment by race and race/gender." (2022). • Created with Datawrapper

Latinos are the largest minority student population in Massachusetts (205,136 students) and also the fastest growing student population (see Table 1). From AY2010 to AY2020, the size of the Latino student population increased by 45%, at an average yearly rate of growth of 3.8%. (DESE, “Enrollment by race and race/gender: AY 2010 & 2020,” 2022)



Table 2. Change in number of Latinos enrolled in selected districts from AY2010 to AY2020

## Change in Latino Student Enrollment in Selected Districts

The graph displays the growth and/or decline of Latino student enrollment in selected districts from AY2010 to AY2020.

	2010	2020	Percentage of Growth
Revere	2,458	4,320	75.8%
Lynn	6,366	10,597	66.5%
Methuen	1,800	2,996	66.4%
New Bedford	3,525	5,269	49.5%
Lowell	3,373	4,961	47.1%
Fitchburg	2,019	2,853	41.3%
Chicopee	2,134	2,850	33.6%
Brockton	2,186	2,723	24.6%
Worcester	8,948	10,797	20.7%
Chelsea	4,601	5,482	19.1%
Somerville	1,738	2,061	18.6%
Springfield	14,255	16,777	17.7%
Lawrence	10,982	12,701	15.7%
Boston	21,927	21,413	-2.3%
Holyoke	4,544	4,311	-5.1%

Table: Gastón Institute. • Source: DESE, "Enrollment by race and race/gender." (2022). • Created with Datawrapper

While Latino students attend schools throughout the Commonwealth, most Latino students are highly concentrated in just a few school districts. In AY2020, about 54% of Latino students were enrolled in 4% of the state's public school districts (15 of 392). Table 2 displays comparison data for some of the school districts with the largest Latino populations and the Latino student enrollment growth from 2010 to 2020. With respect to 2010, Latino student enrollment increased in smaller cities such as Everett, Haverhill, Marlborough, Waltham, Leominster, and Fall River, which in 2020 jointly enrolled about 7% of all Latino students in the state. Table 2 shows a decrease of Latino enrollment in Boston along with a large enrollment growth of Latino students in places such as Lynn, Methuen, and Revere.

Table 3 shows that Lawrence Public Schools, which is almost half the size of Boston (the most populous school district), is the district with the largest percentage enrollment (93.7%) of Latino students. There are currently nine districts where Latinos make up more than 50% of the student population: Lawrence, Chelsea (87.6%), Holyoke (80.6%), Springfield (67.1%), Lynn (65.9%), Revere (57.4%), Everett (57.1%), Fitchburg (53.4%), and Marlborough (51.9%). These districts enroll almost one third of all the Latino students in the state (31%). Boston, which enrolls about 10% of all students in the state, has a percentage of Latino students of 42.3%. This table shows that Latino families are moving to areas other than traditional urban centers in Massachusetts.

Table 3. Share of Latino students in selected school districts accounting for 64% of all Latino students in Massachusetts in AY2020

## Proportion of Latino Students in Selected School Districts

The table lists the 22 school districts accounting for 64% of all Massachusetts Latino student enrollment in AY2020.

School	Total	Latino	Pct. Latino Students
Lawrence	13,550	12,701	93.7%
Chelsea	6,255	5,482	87.6%
Holyoke	5,350	4,311	80.6%
Springfield	25,007	16,777	67.1%
Lynn	16,088	10,597	65.9%
Revere	7,532	4,320	57.4%
Everett	7,057	4,032	57.1%
Fitchburg	5,338	2,853	53.4%
Marlborough	4,757	2,471	51.9%
Methuen	6,851	2,996	43.7%
Worcester	25,044	10,797	43.1%
Boston	50,480	21,413	42.4%
Waltham	5,738	2,430	42.3%
Somerville	4,939	2,061	41.7%
New Bedford	12,880	5,269	40.9%
Chicopee	7,268	2,850	39.2%
Haverhill	8,063	3,117	38.7%
Leominster	6,078	2,232	36.7%
Lowell	14,434	4,961	34.4%
Framingham	9,088	2,914	32.1%
Fall River	10,229	2,958	28.9%
Malden	6,481	1,689	26.1%

Table: Gastón Institute. • Source: DESE, "Enrollment by race and race/gender." (2022). • Created with Datawrapper

*English Learners (ELs)*

Between AY2010 and AY2020, the enrollment of English Learners (ELs) Massachusetts increased by 27%. In 2008-09, there were 57,002 ELs in the Commonwealth, or 6% of the total student population (Karp and Uriarte, 2010) but in 2020, ELs represented almost 11% of the total student population. Table 4 shows that Latino ELs represent about 62% of the state’s English Learners (DESE, “District Enrollment Rates,” 2020) and about 30% of all Latino students. In contrast, Black ELs represent about 15% of all Black students and White ELs represent about 2% of all White students.

Table 4: EL status by race/ethnicity AY2020.

**English Learner (EL) Status by Race and or Ethnicity in Massachusetts**

Latino ELs represent about 62% of all ELs in the state and about 30% of all Latino students enrolled in the state in AY2020.

	Not EL	EL	Total
Asian	55,531	11,996	67,527
Black	73,262	13,791	87,053
<b>Latino</b>	<b>142,783</b>	<b>62,353</b>	<b>205,136</b>
Multi-race	36,246	998	37,244
Native American	1,826	255	2,081
Pacific Islander	668	113	681
White	535,651	13,355	549,006
Total	845,967	102,861	948,828

Table: Gastón Institute. • Source: DESE, "Student Information Management System (SIMS)." 2021. • Created with Datawrapper

**Educational Outcomes for Latinos in the Commonwealth**

Disparities are noteworthy across indicators of Latino academic progress, such as

attendance, disciplinary actions, achievement, dropping out, and graduation.

### *Attendance*

Not only is attendance one of the basic measures for student engagement, but high absenteeism rates also influence learning and graduation. In fact, research by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for its Early Warning Indicator System shows that students who are chronically absent (missing 10% or more of school) in Grade 10 have an on-time graduation rate of 69% while those who are not chronically absent have a 96% rate.<sup>7</sup> In addition, high rates of absenteeism have been associated with dropping out of school (Lavan & Uriarte, 2008).

In AY2019 Massachusetts students were absent for an average of 9.6 days during the school year. Latino students have the highest rate of absenteeism of any group in the state, at an average of 12.6 days (about 2 weeks) during the school year, which is essentially the same as the Latino attendance data reported in 2010 (12.8 days) (DESE, “*2018-2019 Attendance Report (District)*,” 2022)

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<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE). “The ABCs of Success in High School and Beyond.” Accessed in March 2022. <https://abcs.sites.digital.mass.gov>

Table 5. Attendance rate of students in MA disaggregated by race and ethnicity. AY 2019

### Attendance by Race/Ethnicity in Massachusetts Schools

In AY2019, Latino students displayed the largest average number of absences across the different racial and ethnic groups. In addition, almost half of all Latino students (46.6%) are absent from school 10 or more days.

Student Group	Attendance Rate	Average # of Absences	Absent 10 or more days	Chronically Absent (10% or more)
<b>Latino</b>	<b>92.7%</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>
American Indian or Alaskan Native	93.2%	11.9	43.8%	18.9%
Black	94.1%	10.3	35.2%	16.2%
Multi-race	94.4%	9.8	35.7%	13.7%
White	95.1%	8.7	31.3%	9.7%
Asian	96.2%	6.6	22.2%	7.5%
<b>All Students</b>	<b>94.6%</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>

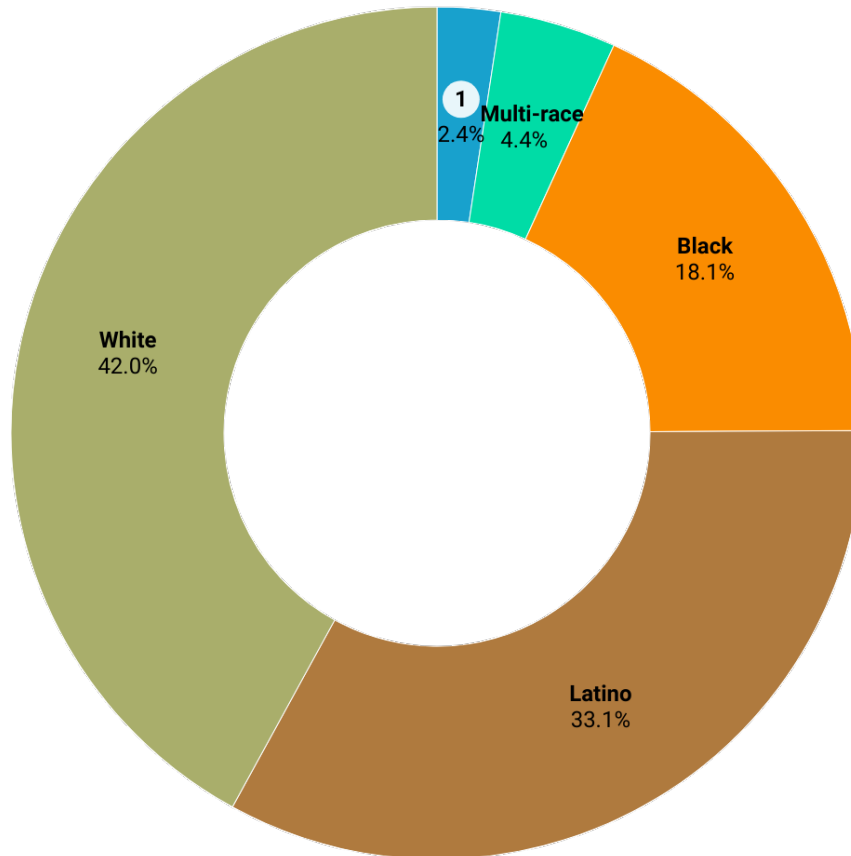
Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, “2018-2019 Attendance Report (District)”, 2022. • Created with Datawrapper

### Disciplinary Actions

The achievement gap coincides with what has been called the discipline gap – or the observation that Black and Latino students are more likely to be disciplined in school than their White peers (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2020). There is evidence of the discipline gap in Massachusetts especially for Hispanic/Latino and Black students who are disciplined at rates higher than their shares in the student population. For example, Latino share of students is about 22% (Table 1), but the share of Latino students disciplined in 2019 was 33.1%, more than 10 percentage points higher than their student population share (Figure 2). Once again, this rate of discipline is a powerful reflection of school culture and climate and may result in negative academic outcomes. Research for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Early Warning Indicator System shows that students suspended one or more times in tenth grade have an on-time graduation rate of 74% compared to a 96% rate for those students who were not suspended (DESE, “District Enrollment Rates,” 2020)

Figure 2: Percentage of disciplined students by race/ethnicity. AY2019

## Race and Ethnicity Distribution of Students Disciplined in AY2019



1 Other: Native American, Pacific Islander, Asian.

Chart: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, "2018-19 Student Discipline Days Missed Report - All Offenses - All Students", 2022. • Created with Datawrapper

### *Dropout Rates*

A high school credential is critical to the future of all our young people as a passport to college and career. The Commonwealth measures high school non-completion in several ways. The most commonly used are the annual dropout rate and the four-year cohort dropout rate. The annual dropout rate is the percentage of students (in Grades 9-12) who did not return to school by the following October 1 of the reporting year and/or have left school before earning a high school diploma (DESE, "Annual Dropout Rate vs. Cohort Graduation rate," 2007). This

measure of non-completion is one of the primary ways that the Commonwealth monitors students' overall progress and reports to the US Department of Education.

The percentage rates of students dropping out have been greatly reduced over the past 10 years to the lowest rates since dropouts began to be calculated in the 1960s. The Latino student dropout rate has been cut by over half, from 7.4 % in 2010 to 3.5% in 2020, a trend that is displayed by all student groups. However due to the growth in the Latino student population, the actual number of Latino students who drop out remains high: in 2010 there were 2,915 dropouts and in 2020 there were 2,030 (DESE, "Statistical reports: dropout rates," 2022). There is still a large gap between the dropout rate for the Commonwealth as a whole and for Latino students specifically, with Latinos composing 45 percent of total high school dropouts (see Table 6). There was a fairly significant decline in dropout rates during the first pandemic class of 2020, but further observation and study will be needed to see if this is a one-time event or a trend.

Table 6. Share of high school dropouts by race/ethnicity. AY2000-AY2020

### Distribution of High School Drop-Outs by Race/Ethnicity in AY2020

Latino students' share of enrollment in grades 9-12 is 20%, but their share of dropouts is 45.1%.

	No. students in grades 9- 12	Share (%)	No. of dropouts	% of dropouts
Black	26,935	9.3%	605	13.4%
Asian	19,435	6.7%	102	2.3%
<b>Latino</b>	<b>58,636</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>2,030</b>	<b>45.1%</b>
White	174,989	60.3%	1,599	35.5%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, "Statistical reports: dropout rates." 2022. • Created with Datawrapper



## Graduation Rates

Another way of measuring students' academic progress is by examining graduation rates. Once again, there are multiple specific ways of calculating graduation rates, one of them being the four-year cohort graduation rate. The cohort graduation rate tracks a cohort of students from Grade 9 through high school. It represents the percentage of that cohort who graduate within a given time.

Table 7 presents data on the four-year cohort graduation rate. Between 2010 and 2020, the cohort graduation rate in Massachusetts rose from 82.1% to 89%. During this time, the cohort graduation rate for Latino students rose more sharply (from 61.2% in 2010 to 77.2 % in 2020). This improvement in the Latino graduation four-year cohort rates (and in access to a critical high school credential) has also reduced the gap between Latino students and the rest of the Massachusetts student population: from about 21 percentage points in 2010 to about 11 points in 2020. To be persistently low. The gap between Latino students and the rest of the Commonwealth has been reduced a bit over time, from about 21 percentage points in 2010 to about 11 percentage points in 2020. Still, the figures mean that barely three quarters of Latino

### Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity

The cohort graduation rate tracks a cohort of students from Grade 9 through high school. It represents the percentage of that cohort that graduates within a given time

	2010	2020
Asian	86.9%	95.0%
White	87.7%	93.2%
African Americans	68.7%	83.1%
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>61.2%</b>	<b>77.2%</b>
All	82.1%	89.0%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, Statistical reports: graduation rates (2022). • Created with Datawrapper

students complete high school graduation “on time.”

Table 7: 4-Year cohort graduation rates by race/ethnicity in AY2010 and AY2020

Table 8 disaggregates data on Latinos specifically by sub-categories of interest. There has been considerable gap closing among these groups, particularly for non-English-Learner Latino students. Latinas continue completing high school at higher rates than Latino males. The lowest cohort graduation rate is observed for Latino English Learners; only 62.1% of these students graduate within four years. Overall, however, there has been a substantial increase in graduation rates across the different sub-categories.

Table 8. Latino four-year cohort graduation for selected sub-categories

### Latino 4-year Cohort Graduation Rates for Selected Sub-categories

Percentage 9 to 12 graduates of the same cohort that graduate within four years.

Group	2010	2020
Latino	61.2%	77.1%
Latino (EL)	48.9%	62.1%
Latino (Non-EL)	64.6%	84.0%
Latino (Female)	66.7%	81.7%
Latino (Male)	55.9%	72.8%
All Students	82.1%	89.0%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, "Statistical reports: graduation rates." (2022). • Created with Datawrapper

### College Enrollment of Graduates of Massachusetts High Schools

Between 2010 and 2019, college enrollment of high school seniors remained steady except for a drop among Latinos. In 2020, the first “pandemic class” there was a precipitous drop in college attendance, particularly for Latino students. This drop reflects many communities with large Latino high school populations hardest hit by Covid-19.

Table 9. Enrollment in any college by March after the senior year for Massachusetts public high school graduates

### College Enrollment for Massachusetts Public HS graduates

The table displays the percentage of enrollment in any college by March after the senior year for HS graduates. Note the drop of Latino enrollment in 2020 due to Covid-19.

	2010	2019	2020
Black	71.5%	69.7%	56.6%
Asian	81.4%	84.2%	78.0%
<b>Latino</b>	<b>61.6%</b>	<b>55.0%</b>	<b>42.3%</b>
White	76.6%	75.7%	69.6%
All Students	74.7%	72.2%	64.0%

Source: Mass Dept. Higher Ed. • Created with Datawrapper

It is important to notice that Latino high school graduates who are enrolled in college attend community colleges at nearly twice the rate of Massachusetts high school graduates overall (Table 10). As we saw a drop in Latino first-time college enrollment of 25.4% in the first year of Covid-19<sup>8</sup> and community colleges are an essential incubator for higher education for Latino students, this is a critical element to be addressed in educational policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Mass. Department of Higher Education. “Equity Spotlight: Pandemic Enrollment Changes by Population.” Accessed on March 20, 2022. <https://www.mass.edu/datacenter/2020enrollmenttrends.asp>

Table 10: Percent enrollment of Massachusetts high school graduates attending college in Massachusetts community colleges

**Enrollment share in Massachusetts community colleges by race/ethnicity.**

The table displays the percentage of students attending college who attend MA community colleges for selected racial and ethnic student subgroups.

	2010	2019	2020
Black	28.5%	36.5%	41.0%
Asian	10.8%	11.9%	19.6%
<b>Latino</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>	<b>52.9%</b>
White	14.5%	16.4%	24.3%
All Students	17.8%	21.8%	28.0%

Source: Mass. Dept. of Higher Ed. • Created with Datawrapper

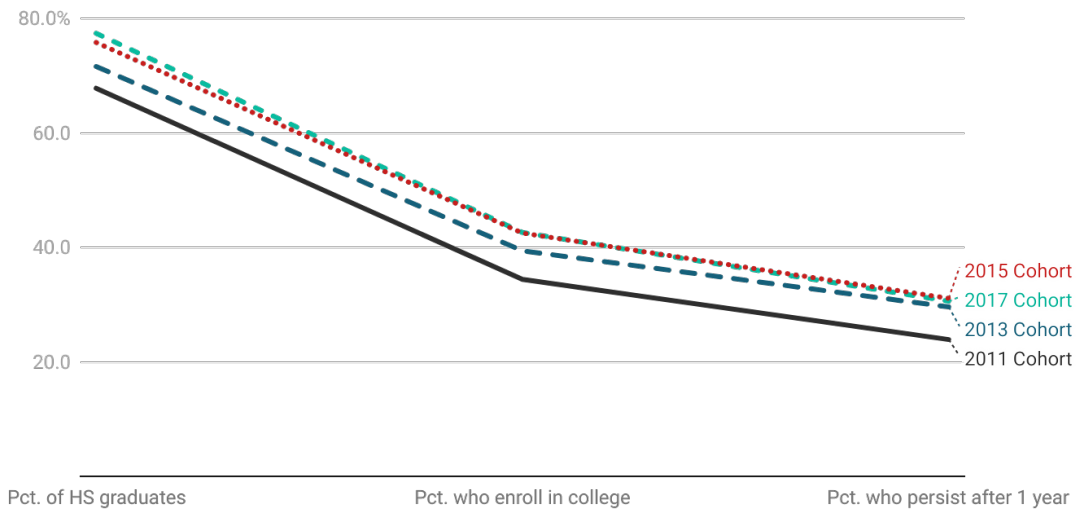
*College Enrollment and Persistence*

As seen in Tables 7 and 8, Latino students’ high school graduation rates have been increasing. The natural question is then, how it is this reflected on the pathway to college success. Figure 3 below displays the variation of the academic trajectory of Latino students from HS graduation, immediate college enrollment, and persistence in college after one year. The steady increases in HS graduation are reflected in the percentage of students persisting after one year. The graphs below reflect the success rates of high school ninth graders.

Figure 3. Variation in Latino students' academic progression across different Grade 9 graduation cohorts

### Latino Students Academic Progression

The graph displays the academic progression of Latino students from HS graduation to persistence in college after one year for selected cohorts of Latino student graduates.



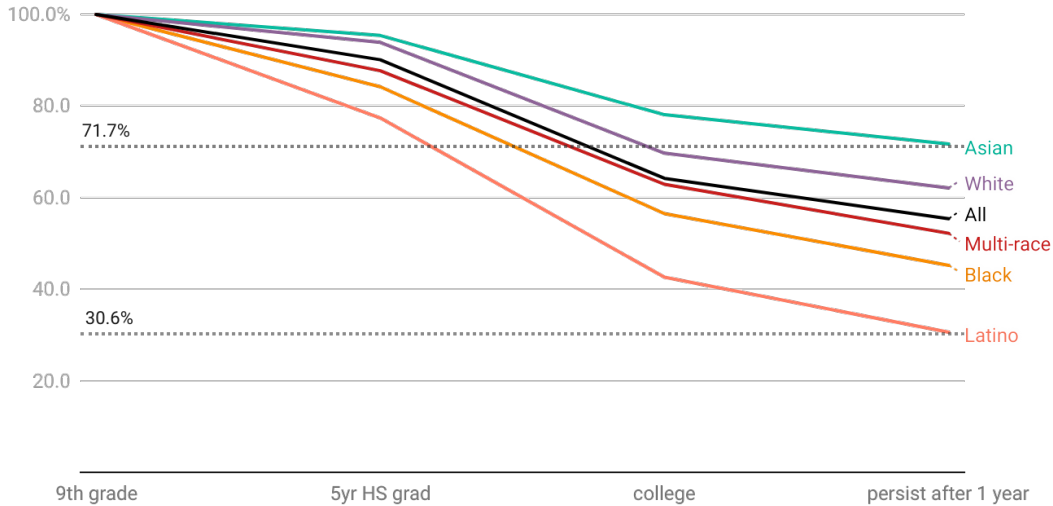
Source: DESE 2020. Analysis by Gastón Institute. • Created with Datawrapper

However, Figure 4 below shows that the increased percentage in persistence has not been enough to close the gap between Latino students and Asian-American and White students. In particular, the percentage of Latino students who persist after one year at 30.6% is 40 percentage points below the corresponding percentage for Asian American students (71.6%).

Figure 4. Comparison of academic progression by race and ethnicity

### Student Academic progression AY 2017

The graph displays the academic progression of all 2017 student groups taking as reference baseline the students who enroll in 9th grade.



Source: DESE 2020. Analysis by Gastón Institute. • Created with Datawrapper

## Student Achievement

Under the current policy climate, standardized tests assessing student learning are of heightened importance. An examination of two measures of student achievement – the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), administered by the Commonwealth, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, which use a representative sample of U.S. students and are used to measure the nation’s progress – reveal that after more than a decade of various public education reform efforts in both the Commonwealth and the nation, Latino students are performing at low levels compared to other students. In fact, Latinos are among those groups that are most likely to perform at the lowest possible levels across grade levels and subject areas.

### *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)*

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the Commonwealth’s standards-based student assessment program. In March 2017, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new achievement levels for the next-generation tests. These next-generation achievement levels differ from MCAS achievement levels listed below in 2010

and are reported using a different scale. The next-generation achievement levels are designed to provide an indication of whether a student is on track to succeed in the subject matter and whether extra academic assistance may be needed for the student. Because next-generation MCAS tests are scored on a different scale from older MCAS tests, **next-generation scores from 2012 and after should not be compared to legacy scores before that year.** Therefore, the scores referred to below aim to show the continuing gap between Latinos and other student groups in academic performance as opposed to showing absolute student achievement as measured by MCAS. In addition, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, MCAS testing did not take place in 2020, so we display 2019 MCAS results instead.

### *Reading/English Language Arts*

In 2010, in each grade in which students take the Reading/English Language Arts MCAS test, Latino students had the lowest percentage of students (other than students with disabilities) whose achievement levels were reported as Advanced or Proficient. In 2019, the percentage of Latino students who are meeting expectations or above continued to be low, and the gaps with respect to the highest performance group of students still hovered around 45 percentage points or more. Just as in the 2010 MCAS, 2019 MCAS achievement levels displayed a large gap with respect to high-achieving student groups (see Table 11). For example, in Grade 5, the difference in the percentage of Latinos at the two highest performance levels with respect to the percentage of Asian students was 34 percentage points in year 2010, and 38 percentage points in 2019. Table 11 does not show a significant reduction of the gap in any of Grades 5, 8, or 10.

Table 11. Gaps in Reading/English Language Arts MCAS achievement levels for Grades 5, 8, and 10 disaggregated by race and/or ethnicity

### Evolution of Gap in Achievement Levels for MCAS ELA

Gap in percentage points between student groups with respect to the highest-achievement student group. The table shows the difference between the percentage of students at the top two highest performance levels across the different ethnic and racial groups.

	5th grade		8th Grade		10th Grade	
	2010	2019	2010	2019	2010	2019
Stud. w/ Disabilities	-48%	-57%	-49%	-59%	-46%	-55%
EL/Former EL	-40%	-40%	-51%	-51%	-56%	-58%
Low-Income	-31%	-39%	-26%	-44%	-25%	-38%
African American/Black	-31%	-39%	-26%	-41%	-24%	-39%
Asian	0%	0%	0%	0%	-3%	0%
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	<b>-34%</b>	<b>-38%</b>	<b>-30%</b>	<b>-43%</b>	<b>-28%</b>	<b>-41%</b>
Native American	-30%	-31%	-19%	-31%	-13%	-24%
White	-1%	-15%	-1%	-14%	0%	-7%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, "State achievement in English language arts, mathematics, & science," (2019) • Created with Datawrapper

### Mathematics

In 2019, the percentage of Latino students who are meeting expectations or above in MCAS Mathematics, continues to be low and the gaps with respect to the highest performance group of students is almost 50 percentage points or more. Just as in 2010 Math MCAS, in 2019 the achievement levels for Latino students displayed a large gap with respect to high-achieving student groups (see Table 12). For example, in Grade 5, the difference in the percentage of Latinos in the two highest performance levels with respect to Asian students was 44 percentage points in 2010 and 48 percentage points in 2019.



Table 12. Gaps in Mathematics MCAS achievement levels for Grades 5, 8, and 10 disaggregated by race and/or ethnicity

## Evolution of Gap In Achievement Levels for MCAS Math

Gap in percentage points between student groups with respect to the highest-achievement student group. The table shows the difference between the percentage of students at the top two highest performance levels across the different ethnic and racial groups.

	5th grade		8th grade		10th grade	
	2010	2019	2010	2019	2010	2019
Stud. w/ Disabilities	-56%	-62%	-61%	-65%	-51%	-64%
EL/Former EL	-44%	-44%	-54%	-54%	-51%	-60%
Low-Income	-41%	-49%	-44%	-51%	-30%	-48%
Black	-43%	-47%	-46%	-51%	-34%	-48%
Asian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Latino</b>	<b>-44%</b>	<b>-48%</b>	<b>-49%</b>	<b>-51%</b>	<b>-38%</b>	<b>-49%</b>
Native American	-33%	-39%	-36%	-40%	-22%	-35%
White	-12%	-22%	-16%	-23%	-6%	-17%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE, "State achievement in English language arts, mathematics, & science." (2019). • Created with Datawrapper

### *Science, Technology, and Engineering*

The MCAS test of Science, Technology and Engineering is the newest of the statewide subject tests and has not yet changed its scoring levels to match the Mathematics and English Language Arts tests. Beginning with the class of 2010, in addition to meeting a competency determination in the ELA and Math tests, MCAS students must also meet a competency determination in the Science, Technology and Engineering MCAS to be eligible to receive a high school diploma. Figure 5 shows how in each grade when students take this test, Latino students display the lowest percentage of students who score in the two top higher

performance levels (Advanced or Proficient). Latino 8th graders are in the lowest performance category on this MCAS test, with only 52% performing at Advanced or Proficient levels compared to 79% of students overall.

Figure 5: Science, Technology, and Engineering: Percentage of students in Proficient/Advanced categories by race/ethnicity. 2019

### MCAS Science and Technology Performance AY2019

The graph displays the the percentage of students in the two highest performance levels (proficient or advanced) across different racial and ethnic groups.

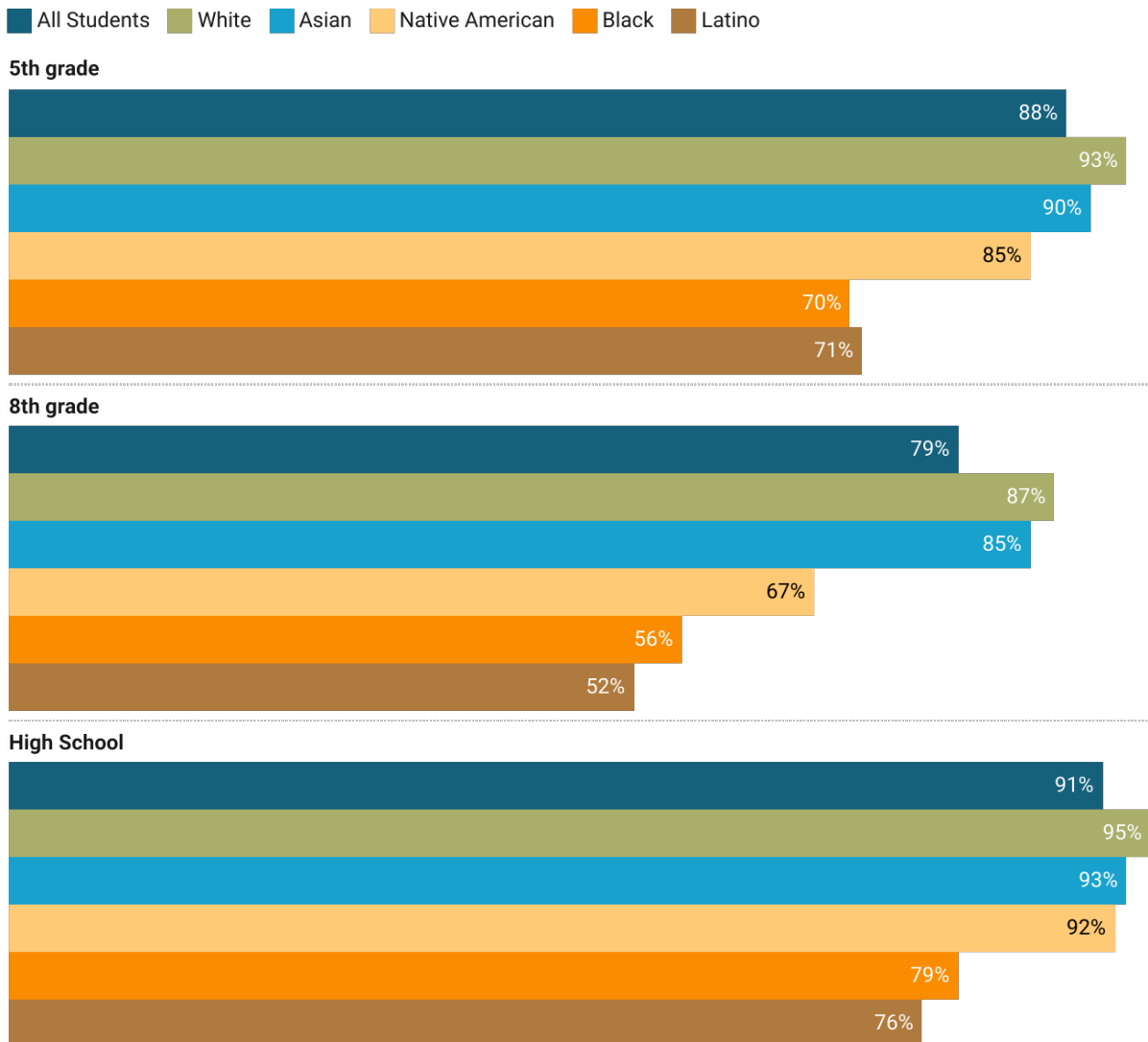


Chart: Gastón Institute • Source: DESE. 2019-2020 Massachusetts State Report Card, (2019). • Created with Datawrapper

### *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*

NAEP, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress, is also referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card.” Students take the NAEP tests in reading and mathematics every two years (DESE, “2019-2020 MA State Report Card: Part II,” 2019). Although Massachusetts leads the nation in overall performance, there is still a substantial gap between the scores of Latino and Black students and their White peers.

#### *Reading*

Massachusetts does better than the nation – and Latinos in Massachusetts do slightly better than Latinos nationally – on the NAEP Reading test. However, Latinos are disproportionately underperforming at the lowest levels within the state on the Reading test compared to other groups by race/ethnicity.

In the 2019 NAEP, Latino 4th graders, along with Black in the same grade, had the highest percentage of students in the Commonwealth who scored “Below Basic” (42% of each group). Asian and Pacific Islander students (11%), and Whites (16%) are the two student subgroups with the lowest percentage of students scoring below basic. The Latino “Below Basic” rate in Massachusetts was slightly lower than it was for Latinos nationally (42% vs. 46%) on the Reading test.

In the 2019 NAEP, 19% of 8th graders in Massachusetts scored “Below Basic” on the Reading exam. Latinos had the highest percentage of students in the state score “Below Basic” on Reading (37%), compared with Black students (29%), White students (13%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (7%). Latinos in Massachusetts are analogous with Latinos nationally, as the Latino “Below Basic” rate for 8th graders on the reading test in the Commonwealth was virtually the same as for Latinos for Latinos nationally.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Mathematics*

Massachusetts does better than the nation – and Latinos in Massachusetts do better than Latinos nationally – on the NAEP Math test. However, just as in the NAEP Reading test,

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<sup>9</sup> Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). “National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).” Accessed on March 20, 2022. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/natl-intl/naep/> ;

Latinos are still more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to be at the lowest performance levels in the Commonwealth on the Math test.

In the 2019 NAEP, 15% of 4th graders in Massachusetts overall scored “Below Basic” on the Math test. Latino 4th graders had the highest percentage of students in the Commonwealth score “Below Basic” (27%), followed by Black students (25%), Asians and Pacific Islanders (3%), and White students (9%). At 27%, Latinos’ “Below Basic” rate for Massachusetts was equal to the rate for Latinos nationally on the math test.

In the 2019 NAEP, 22% of 8th graders in Massachusetts scored “Below Basic” on the Math test, Latino and Black 8th graders are the two student groups with the highest percentage of students score “Below Basic” (43% and 46% respectively), followed by Whites (14%) and Asian and Pacific Islanders (5%). Once again, the Latino “Below Basic” rate for 8th graders in Massachusetts was the same as for Latinos nationally (43%) on the Math test.<sup>10</sup> Tables 13 and 14, below, show that the progress of Latino 8th and 4th graders in the NAEP Math assessment is minimal, and show that the huge gaps with respect to White and Asian-American students persist.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Table 13. Percentage of students who score “Below Basic” in NAEP Assessment Grade 4 by race/ethnicity.

## NAEP Assessment Grade 4 Performance by Race/Ethnicity

This table displays the percentage of students who score "Below Basic" in the 2010 and the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. In Massachusetts, Latino students display the largest percentage of students scoring "Below Basic."

		Reading		Mathematics	
		2010	2019	2010	2019
White	National	23%	24%	10%	12%
	Massachusetts	13%	16%	3%	9%
Black	National	53%	53%	37%	35%
	Massachusetts	38%	42%	16%	25%
Latino	National	52%	46%	30%	27%
	Massachusetts	44%	42%	22%	27%
Asian/Pacific Islander	National	21%	20%	9%	9%
	Massachusetts	15%	11%	4%	3%

Table: Gastón Institute. • Source: NAEP 2019. • Created with Datawrapper

Table 14. Percentage of students who score “Below Basic” in NAEP Assessment Grade 8 by race/ethnicity.

### NAEP Assessment Grade 8 Performance by Race/Ethnicity

This table displays the percentage of students who score "Below Basic" in the 2010 and the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. In Massachusetts, Latino students display the largest percentage of students scoring "Below Basic."

		Reading		Mathematics	
		2010	2019	2010	2019
White	National	17%	19%	18%	21%
	Massachusetts	13%	13%	9%	14%
Black	National	44%	47%	51%	54%
	Massachusetts	36%	29%	38%	46%
Latino	National	41%	38%	44%	43%
	Massachusetts	38%	37%	38%	43%
Asian/Pacific Islander	National	18%	15%	16%	15%
	Massachusetts	11%	7%	10%	5%

Table: Gastón Institute • Source: NAEP, 2019. • Created with Datawrapper

### Conclusions

Educational data clearly illustrate the tremendous opportunity gaps facing Latino students in Massachusetts in 2020 and beyond. They also illustrate progress in educational achievement, particularly in high school graduation, over the past 10 years. We have learned that there has been some promise in the last quarter century of educational reform and investment across the Commonwealth. Largely, academic achievement has increased across many measures across many different student groups. “The rising tide has lifted many boats,” and there should be pause for applauding the work of many educators across Massachusetts public schools. However positive these advances have been, we realize that the promise of educational reform

has really benefitted those student groups (including White, Asian, higher-income, and non-English-Learner students) who have been able to take full advantage of these opportunities. It has also illuminated enormous gaps in opportunity and achievement for many student groups and particularly for one of our fastest growing populations, Latino students.

As many in the Latino community have shared, there is no more direct path to “securing the dream” than through ensuring a high-quality education for our youth. Massachusetts does not have a preponderance of exportable natural resources to drive its high-flying economy; rather, it is built on the knowledge, skills, and experiences built through primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Youth who are unprepared to access and succeed in post-secondary educational opportunities are locked out from a multitude of careers with family-supporting wages and pathways to advancement that have been available to generations of Massachusetts residents in its history.

The new wave of educational reform in the Commonwealth must respond to the needs and concerns of the Latino community and its youth. The Commonwealth’s future depends on it. The strength and livelihood of a resilient and proud community depend on it. Not to be lost among all the educational data above are the dreams and aspirations of our children and youth: those dreams to be scientists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs, nurses, and every career in between; those aspirations to stand on the shoulders of giants, namely, their parents, grandparents, and others who came in search of this promise of success and a better life.

The data cry out for a new Latino Education agenda. The elaboration of this agenda would be a complex process because no single legislative action, program, or initiative is going to close the yawning achievement gaps between Latinos and other student groups. No solitary declaration or leader can address the complexities within these issues. A Latino Education agenda is part aspirational compact, a collaboration of community, family, schools, educators, students, community organizations, colleges, and state and government officials dedicated to

closing this gap. It is also more technical, a series of laws, programs, and initiatives funded by sustainable resources to use data-driven solutions to help close the achievement gap. These technical solutions are made more complex by the non-monolithic nature of the Latino communities across the state, and it would need to engage with Latino communities that have different historical patterns of settlement across the state and whose needs differ by reason of geography, socio-economic status, and opportunities available. These solutions will need to address diverse issues such as student English proficiency, generations of underinvestment and disadvantage in certain cities and towns with high density of Latino populations, and the implementation of specific programming for Latino students particularly in school districts with Latino majorities.

We call for a new K-12 Latino Education Agenda for the Commonwealth. It will be good for Latino youth and critical for the future of our society and the state's economy.

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## About the 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 33rd 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).

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