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Latinos in Massachusetts Public Schools: Somerville

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Recommended Citation

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A large, stylized geometric pattern in shades of blue, featuring concentric squares, circles, and zig-zag lines, resembling a traditional textile or architectural motif.

Latinos in Massachusetts Public Schools

Somerville

by Michael Berardino

April, 2015

THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND PUBLIC POLICY

Somerville

This report provides a snapshot of current educational outcomes for Latino students in the city of Somerville. It is based on publicly available data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE) that have been analyzed for the community by the Gastón Institute. Using the ethno-racial categories assigned by MADESE, the report focuses on demographic trends and the most recent educational outcomes of Latino students relative to other ethno-racial groups in the school district and to students statewide. The report has three sections:

The first section illustrates the demographic shift occurring in the Somerville Public Schools. Enrollment has been shrinking among White and African-American/Black students, but increasing among Latino students, and as a result Latino students are now the largest ethno-racial group in the district.

The second section compares the performance of Latino students in Somerville on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests with the performance of all students statewide and other ethno-racial groups in Somerville. Despite persistent disparities in outcomes, the achievement gap between Latino and White students has been shrinking slightly over recent years, especially on the Grade 10 English Language Arts and Science/Technology/Engineering tests. Latino students in Somerville score above the statewide Latino proficiency rate on all MCAS tests in Grades 7 through 10.

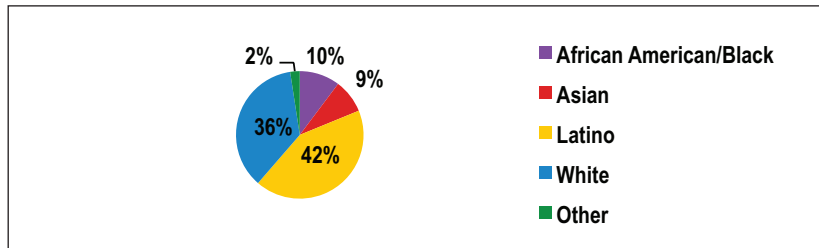
The third section shows Latino graduation, dropout, and college enrollment rates, relative to other students in the district and to all students statewide. Here too, the data show disparities between Latino students and other ethno-racial groups in the district. One promising trend is a notable rise in the Latino college enrollment rate.

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. Ethno-Racial Composition of Somerville Public Schools, SY2015



Source: MADESE (n.d.). Enrollment Data.

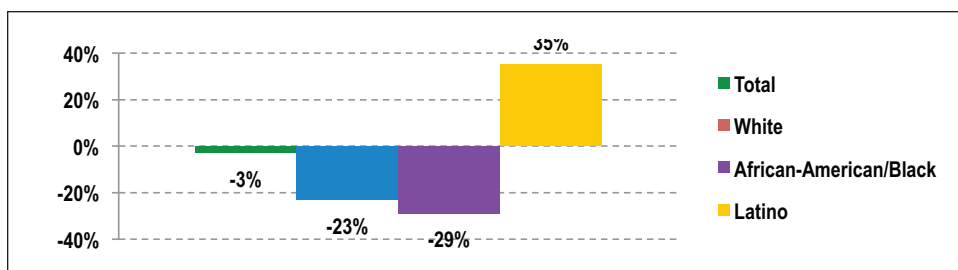
Somerville had an enrollment of 4,987 students in SY2015.² A majority (67%) of its students are classified as low-income, the sixteenth highest percentage among all school districts in the state.³ Half (50%) of the students in Somerville spoke a language other than English as their first language and 17% are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs), the sixth and eleventh highest proportions among all districts in the state. As seen in Figure 1, Latino students are the largest student group in the district: the 2,110 Latino students constitute 42% of the total enrollment in Somerville, the ninth highest proportion in the state. White students make up 36% of the district, African-American/Black students 10%, Asian students 9%, and all other ethno-racial groups together 2%. Almost one-third (29%) of Latino students in Somerville are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs). While specific information about the ancestry of the Latino students in Somerville is not available, the American Community Survey estimates that 28% of Latinos in Somerville are of Salvadoran heritage, 17% are of Puerto Rican heritage, 11% of Mexican heritage, 10% of Dominican heritage, 9% of Guatemalan heritage, and the remaining 25% of other Latino heritages (ACS, 2014).

As seen in Figure 2 below, from SY2006 to SY2015 the overall number of students in the district decreased by 3%. Over this time, the number of African-American/Black students decreased by 29% and the number of White students by 23%, while the number of Latino students increased by 35%. As a result of this demographic shift, Latino students went from the second largest student group at 30% of all students in SY2006, to the largest ethno-racial group in the district at 42%.

² SY refers to the ending year of the school year. For example, SY2014 is the school year that began in September of 2013 and ended in June of 2014.

³ As compared to all non-charter school districts in Massachusetts.

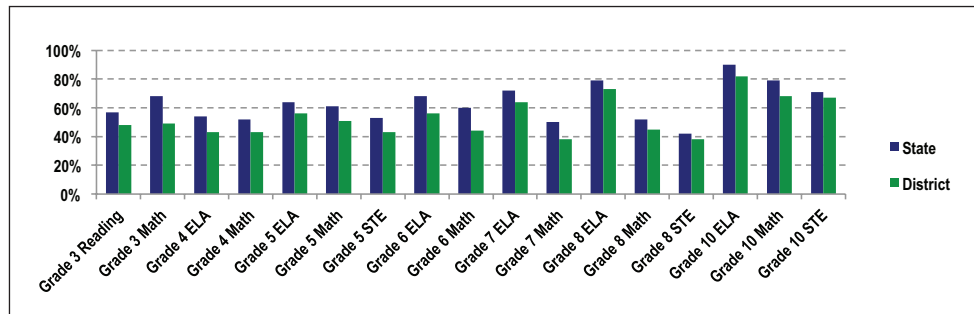
Figure 2: Change in Student Enrollment, Somerville Public Schools, SY2006 to SY2015



Source: Author's calculations based on MADESE (n.d.). Enrollment Data.

II. MCAS Performance

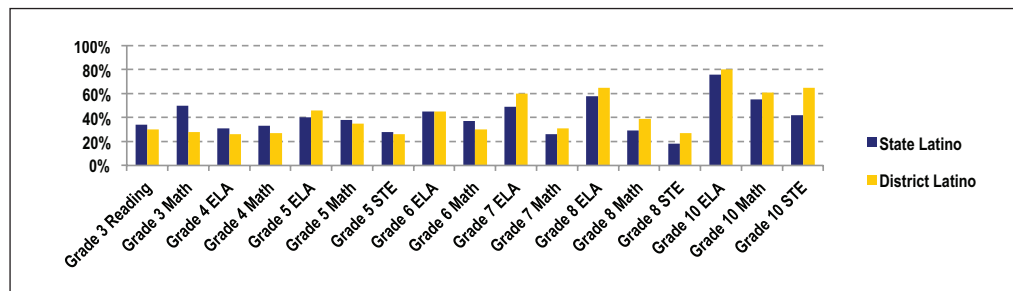
Figure 3: Percentage of All Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on MCAS Tests by Grade and Subject, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). MCAS Tests of Spring 2014, Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level for Somerville.

As evidenced by Figure 3 above, Somerville as a district performs below statewide averages on the standardized tests in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Figure 3 shows the percentage of all students in Somerville and all students statewide who scored “Proficient” or higher on the 2014 MCAS tests in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science/Technology/Engineering (STE). As seen, the proficiency rates in Somerville are slightly below the statewide rates across all grades. Comparing the proficiency rates for Latino students in Somerville to the proficiency rates for Latino students statewide, Figure 4 below shows performance gaps in Grades 3 through 6, but in Grades 7 through 10, Latino students in Somerville have higher proficiency rates than the statewide Latino rates.

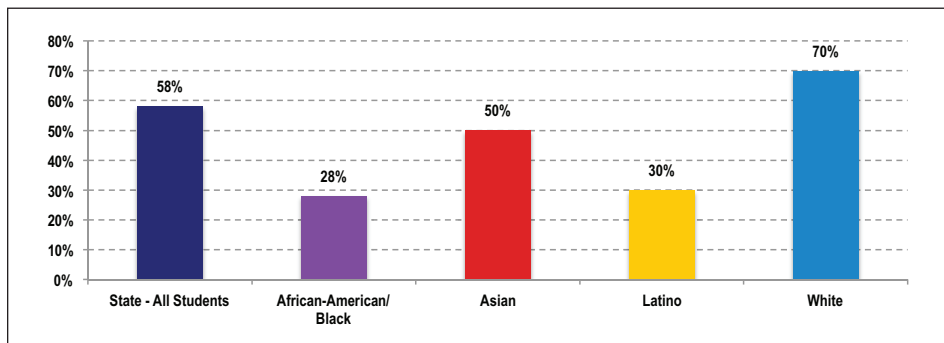
Figure 4: Percentage of Latino Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on MCAS Tests by Grade and Subject, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). MCAS Tests of Spring 2014, Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level for Somerville.

The following section highlights the performance by Latino students in Somerville on the Grade 3 Reading and Grade 10 ELA, Math, and STE tests, all important performance measures. Grade 3 Reading is considered an important measurement for academic preparation, because the end of third grade marks the time when students go from “learning how to read” to “learning from reading.” The Grade 10 MCAS tests are also important as a metric of preparation for participation in post-secondary education. Furthermore, 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. Test results for Latinos in Somerville are compared to the test results for other ethno-racial groups in Somerville and for all students statewide.

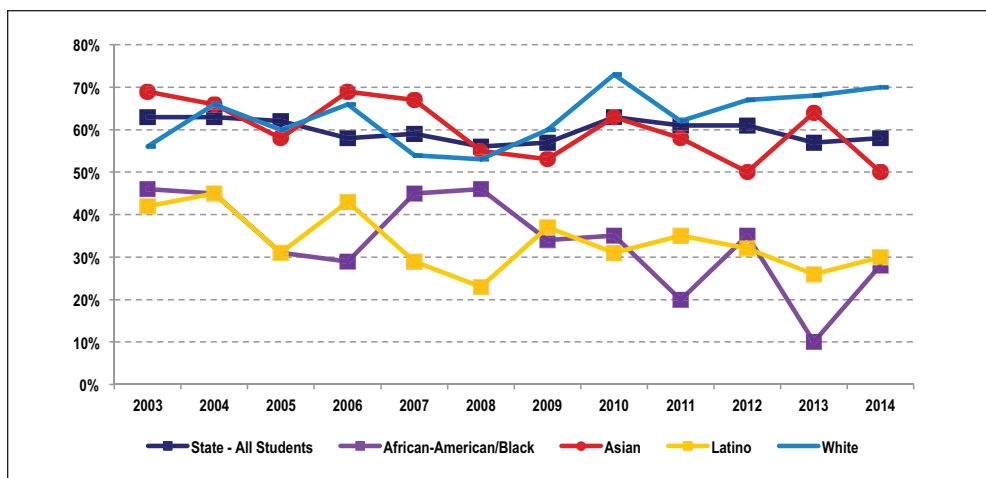
Figure 5: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 3 Reading MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

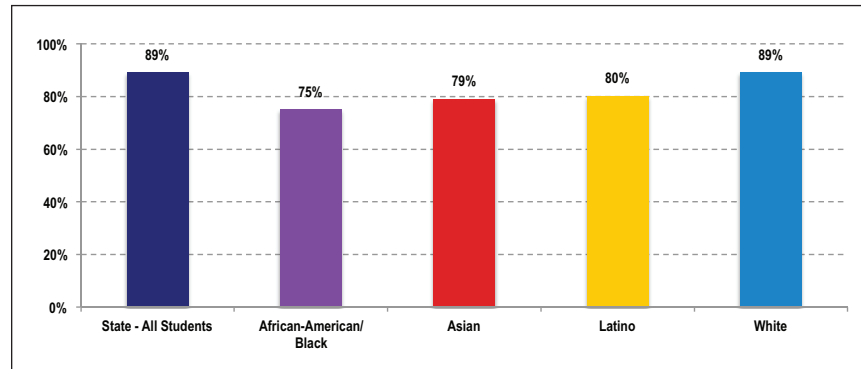
As seen in Figure 5 above, 30% of Latino students in Somerville performed at “Proficient” or higher on the Grade 3 Reading MCAS in SY2014. This proficiency rate was 2 points higher than the rate for African-American/Black students in Somerville, but 20 points below the rate for Asian students in Somerville, 40 percentage points below the rate for White students in Somerville, and 28 points below the rate for all students statewide. Figure 6 below illustrates that the proficiency rate for Latino students has decreased since 2003. Over this time the rate for African-American/Black students in the district decreased at a steeper trajectory, and as a result the Latino students went from a lower proficiency rate to a higher one than African-American students. The gap with Asian students decreased by 26%, but the gap with White students increased by 186% and the gap with all students statewide increased by 33%

Figure 6: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 3 Reading MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003-SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

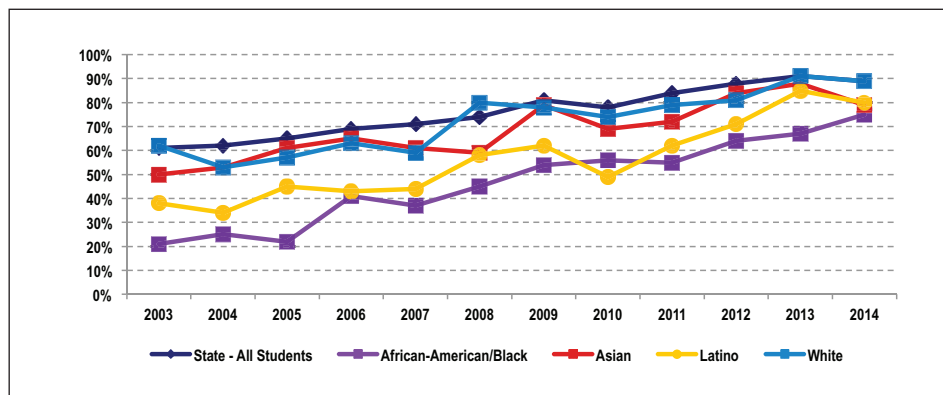
Figure 7: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject

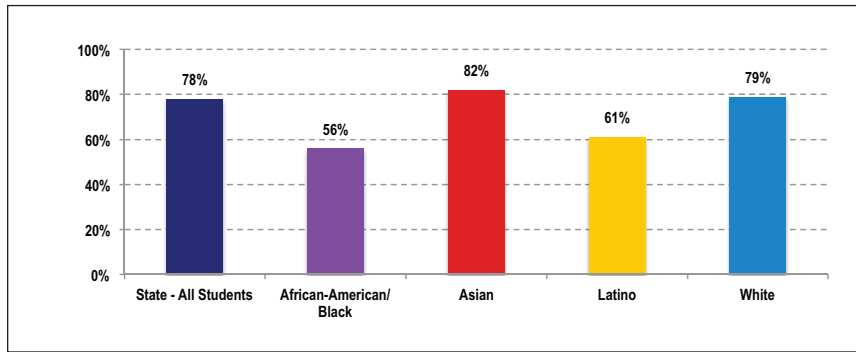
In SY2014, 80% of Latino students in Somerville scored “Proficient” or higher on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test. This pass rate was 5 points higher than the rate for African-American/Black students in the district and 1 point higher than the rate for Asian students, but 9 percentage points lower than the rate for White students in Somerville and the pass rate statewide. As seen in Figure 8 below, the overall pass rate more than doubled from 38% in SY2003 to the 80% rate in SY2014. In fact, from SY2003 to SY2014, Latino students eliminated 63% of the performance gap with White students in Somerville, 61% of the gap with all students statewide, and 100% of the gap with Asian students in Somerville.

Figure 8: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003-SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject

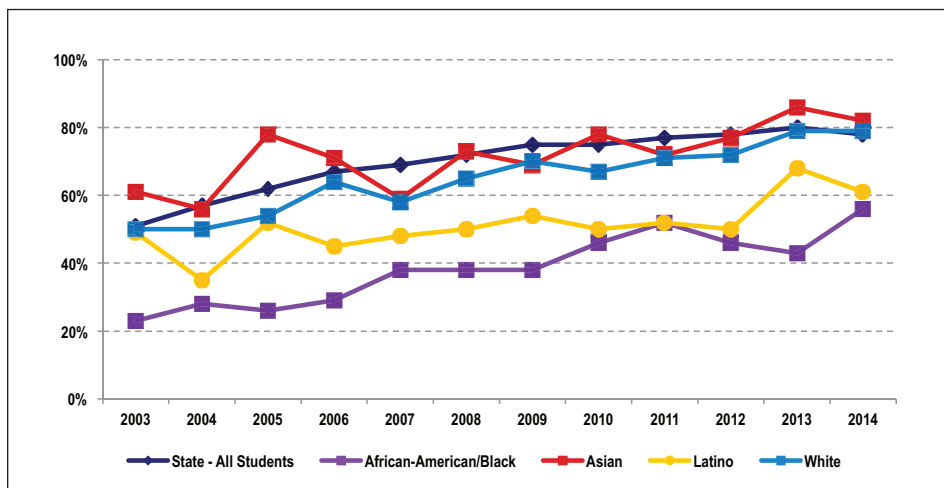
Figure 9: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 10 Math MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

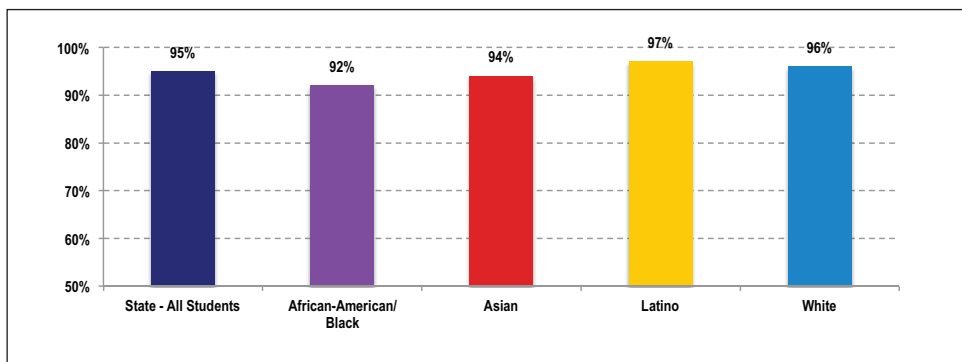
While 80% of Latino students in Somerville in SY2014 passed the Grade 10 ELA test, only 61% passed the Grade 10 Math test. As seen in Figure 9 above, this pass rate is 5 points higher than the rate for African-American/Black students in Somerville but 18 percentage points below the rate for White students in the district, 21 points below the rate for Asian students in Somerville, and 17 points below the rate for all students statewide. Figure 10 below demonstrates that, despite a slump in SY2014, the pass rates for Latino students in Somerville improved markedly from SY2003 to SY2014. However, over this period all other ethno-racial groups improved at a steeper trajectory, and as a result the gaps with African-American/Black, Asian, and White students in Somerville and with all students statewide are worse than in SY2003.

Figure 10: Percentage of Students Scoring “Proficient” or Higher on Grade 10 Math MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2003-SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

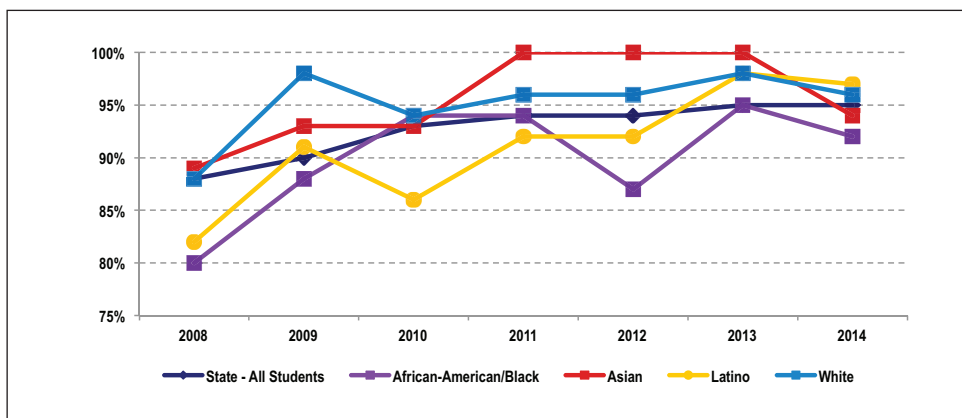
Figure 11: Percentage of Students Scoring “Needs Improvement” or Higher, Grade 10 STE MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

Figure 11 illustrates that in SY2014, Latino students in Somerville had a pass rate of 97% on the Grade 10 Science, Technology, and Engineering MCAS tests (for the STE tests, passing requires a score of “Needs Improvement” or higher). The Latino rate is the highest among all ethno-racial groups in Somerville and 2 points higher than the statewide rate. Figure 12 below shows that Latino students in Somerville have made substantial progress on the STE tests since their introduction in SY2008, improving by 15 percentage points in only seven years and eliminating all performance gaps.

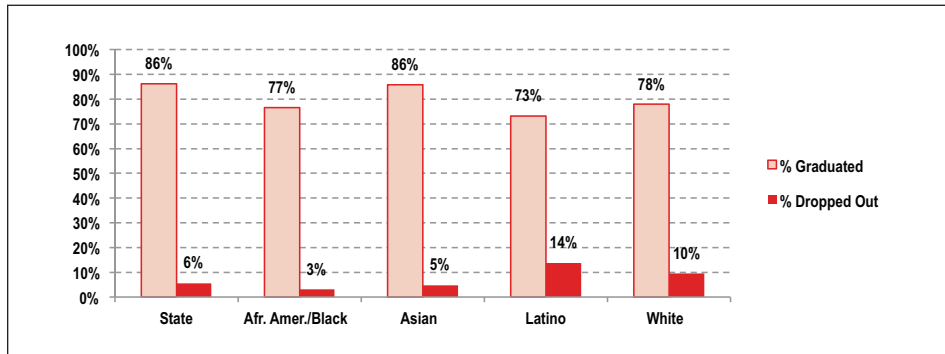
Figure 12: Percentage of Students Scoring “Needs Improvement” or Higher on Grade 10 STE MCAS by Race/Ethnicity, SY2008-SY2014



Source: MADESE (2014). 2014 MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject.

III. Graduation Rate, Dropout Rate, and College Enrollment Rate

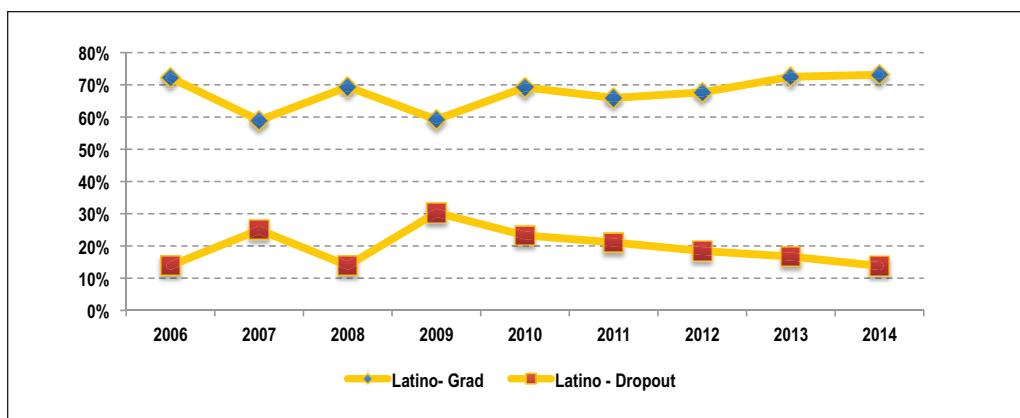
Figure 13: Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (n.d.). Cohort 2014 Graduation Rates.

As demonstrated in Figure 13 above, in SY2014 Latino students had the lowest graduation rate and the highest dropout rate compared to all other ethno-racial groups in the district. For Latino students, the SY2014 four-year graduation rate was 73% and the dropout rate was 14%, as compared to 78% and 10% for White students in Somerville, 86% and 5% for Asian students in Somerville, 77% and 3% for African-American/Black students in Somerville, and 86% and 6% for all students statewide. Furthermore, as seen in Figure 14 below, the Latino graduation and dropout rate were the same in SY2014 as they were in SY2004, resulting in larger gaps with Asian and African-American/Black students in the district and with all students statewide (but slightly smaller gaps with White students in Somerville due to worse rates among White students in the district over this time period).

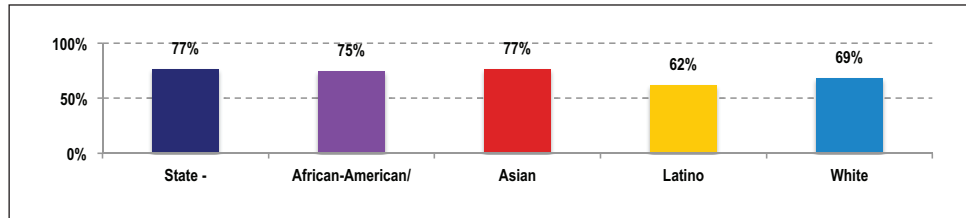
Figure 14: Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity, SY2014



Source: MADESE (n.d.). Cohort 2014 Graduation Rates.

College Enrollment

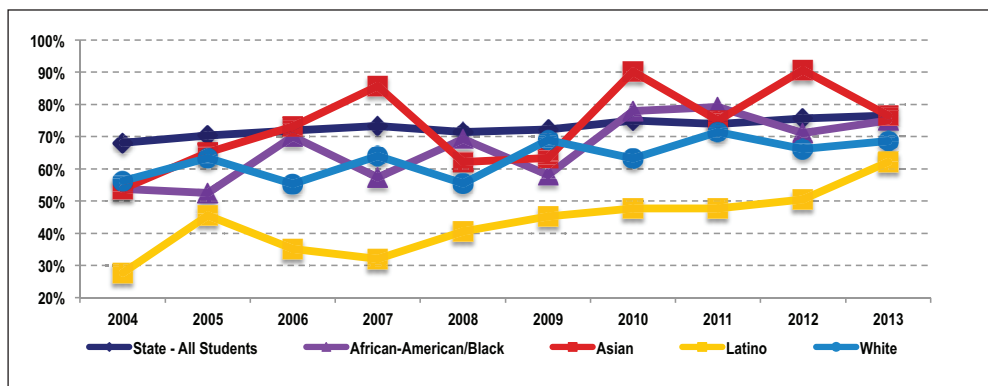
Figure 15: Percentage of High School Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education within 16 Months of Completing High School, SY2013



Source: MADESE (n.d.). 2012-13 Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education, All Colleges and Universities.

Among all students in Somerville who completed high school in SY2013, 68% enrolled in an institution of higher education within 16 months of completing high school, 9 percentage points higher than the rate for all students statewide. As shown in the figure above, among Latino students in Somerville who completed high school in SY2013, 62% enrolled in an institution of higher education within 16 months of completing high school. This was 7 percentage points below the rate for White students in Somerville, 13 points lower than the rate for African-American/Black students in Somerville, and 15 points below the rate for Asian students in Somerville and for all students statewide. As seen in Figure 16 below, however, the 62% Latino college enrollment rate was an substantial increase from 28% in SY2004 and the highest college enrollment rate to date; in those ten years, Latino students eliminated 42% of the gap with Asian students in the district, 50% of the gap with African-American/Black students in the district, a remarkable 75% of the gap with White students in Somerville, and 63% of the gap with all students statewide.

Figure 16: Percentage of High School Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education within 16 Months of Completing High School, SY2004-SY2013



Source: MADESE (n.d.). 2012-13 Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education, All Colleges and Universities.

Almost half (47%) of Latino college attendees from Somerville enroll in two-year colleges, as compared to 52% of African-American/Black enrollees from Somerville, 35% of Asian students, 26% of White students from Somerville, and 30% of all students statewide. Community colleges offer great opportunities to students, but completion rates are much lower at two-year colleges than at four-year colleges and universities. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2013), only 11% of first-time Latino students at Massachusetts two-year public colleges graduate within three years as compared to the 44% of Latino students at Massachusetts four-year public colleges who graduate within six years.

Sources

American Community Survey [ACS] (2014). U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey. Somerville, MA.

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Suggested Citation

Berardino, Michael. “Latino Students in Massachusetts Public Schools – Somerville.” Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston: *Gastón Institute Publications*. April 2015.

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 public schools has increased by 36% (from 125,436 to 171,096 students), rep-

resenting a jump from 13% to 18% in the proportion of all students). In contrast, during the same period the number of African-American/Black students has increased by 3%, while the number of White students has decreased by 14%. 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 an M.S. in Public Policy from the 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.