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Is the Bay Area Preparing Latino High
School Graduates for College? A
Statistical Portrait of College Preparation
in the San Francisco Bay Area

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Is the Bay Area Preparing Latino High School Graduates for College? A Statistical Portrait of College Preparation in the San Francisco Bay Area

Abstract

Latinos are the fastest growing racial ethnic group in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and now constitute 21 percent of the total population. Their representation among K-12 public school enrollment is even higher at 30 percent. Despite this, few studies have examined how well the Bay Area is preparing this group of students for entry into the state's public four year colleges. This research brief explores college preparation in each of the nine counties that consist of the Bay Area and finds that Latinos trail behind non-Latinos in two major indicators of college preparation (completing the A-G course requirements and taking the SAT as high school seniors).

Is the Bay Area Preparing Latino High School Graduates for College?

A Statistical Portrait of College Preparation in the San Francisco Bay Area

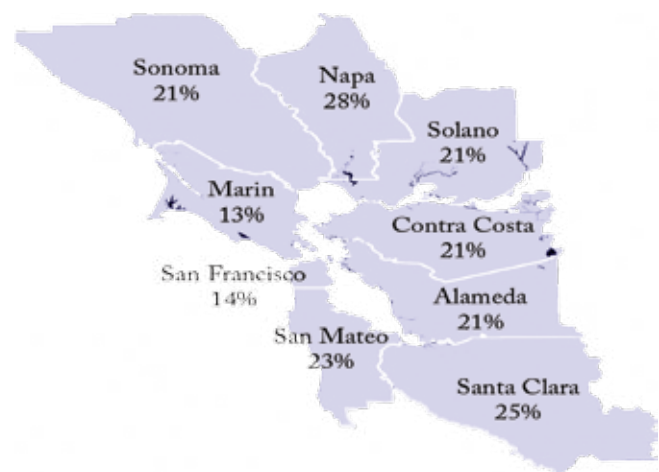
By Lisa Chavez, Oscar Medina, and Gabino Arredondo

The San Francisco Bay Area (hereafter, “Bay Area”) experienced significant growth in its Latino population over the last 35 years. In 1970, Latinos represented just eight percent of the Bay Area population with 380,947 residents. By 1990, the Latino population grew to 939,497 residents. Between 1990 and 2005, the Latino community grew by 54 percent to reach 1,451,468 residents and now constitutes 21 percent of the total Bay Area population. In contrast, the Bay Area population, as a whole, increased by just 13 percent during this time period with the number of white and African-American residents declining by 10 and 3 percent, respectively. Latinos now make up one in five residents in seven of the nine counties that comprise the Bay Area and one in four residents in Santa Clara and Napa counties (see Figure 1).¹

Researchers and policy makers have stressed the need to improve access to higher education for all Californians in order to meet California workforce projections. Observers of California’s racial-ethnic demographic shifts have specifically been concerned about the historically low college graduation rates of Latinos given their rapidly increasing share of the state’s working-age population.² However, too few studies have focused on the prospects for higher education of Latino youth in the Bay Area, a region that is well known for its technological advances in Silicon Valley in the last decade and is highly dependent on the presence of an educated workforce.

This research brief examines how Bay Area Latino youth are faring in their preparation for higher education. In so doing, it places the growth in Latino Bay Area K-12 public school enrollment within a broader context of changing Bay Area population demographics. It also analyzes measures of four-year college preparation and entry rates among Bay Area public high school graduates in comparison to statewide trends. We conclude with a discussion of the structural barriers to preparation faced by Latinos attending the state’s public high schools.

Figure 1: Latino Population in Bay Area Counties, 2005



Source: Based on authors’ calculations of population estimates retrieved from RAND California at <http://ca.rand.org>

Latinos Are the Fastest Growing Group in Bay Area K-12

Over three million Latinos are currently enrolled in California's public schools and they now comprise nearly half of the K-12 public school system (see Table 1). This represents a 42 percent increase in just 10 years. The number of Latinos enrolled in Bay Area public schools increased by nearly the same amount (39 percent). While Latino enrollment in public schools grew substantially in the region as a whole, there was variation across counties. For example, the counties of Sonoma and Contra Costa experienced a near doubling in Latino enrollment while San Francisco County experienced a slight decrease.

In 1995, Latinos comprised 23 percent of the total Bay Area K-12 public school population. Ten years later, they comprised 30 percent and this change is visible throughout the region. For example, in 1995 just three counties—Napa, San Mateo and Santa Clara—had public school populations that consisted of more than 25 percent Latino students. By 2005, seven of the nine counties did so. Napa, Santa Clara and San Mateo counties have particularly high proportions of Latino students (42, 36 and 34 percent, respectively). Santa Clara County is also unique as it, along with Alameda County, is where Latinos are highly concentrated. Together, these two counties serve over 50 percent of the 289,674 Latino students currently enrolled in Bay Area K-12 public schools.

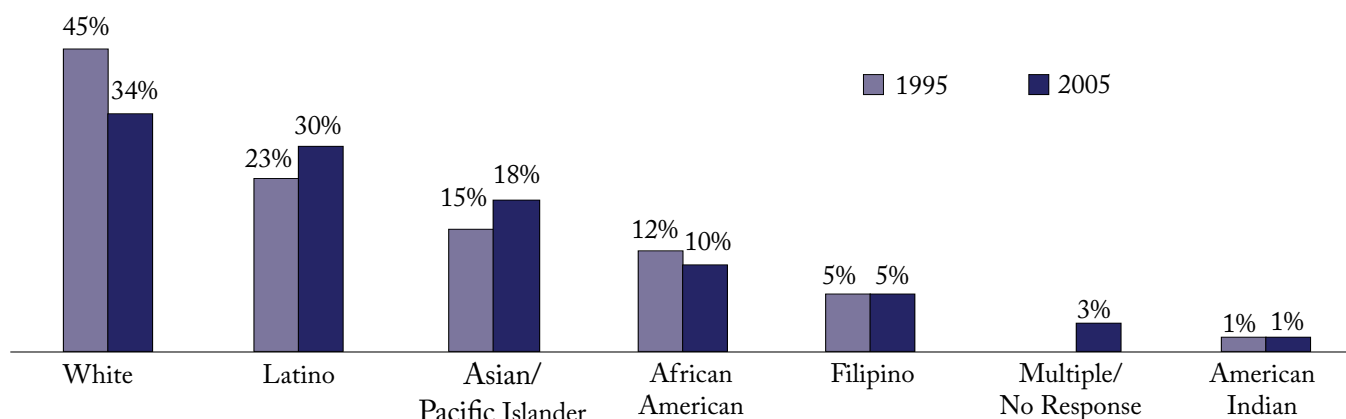
As a result of these shifting school demographics, Latinos are quickly on their way to becoming the largest racial-ethnic group of students enrolled in Bay Area public schools (see Figure 2). In 1995 nearly half of all Bay Area public school students were white and nearly one-quarter were Latino. By 2005, the school population consisted of nearly equal proportions of Latino and white students largely due to a 39 percent increase in Latino students and a 21 percent decrease in white students. The number of African-American and American-Indian students enrolled in the region's public schools also decreased. Schools also serve a greater number of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Filipino students; together with Latinos, they are largely responsible for the modest six percent increase in the region's total public school enrollment with Latinos experiencing the largest growth. Accompanying the growth in Latino students is an increasing number of English Language Learners (ELL) whose first language is Spanish. In 2005 there were 142,455 ELL Spanish-speaking students enrolled in Bay Area public schools, up 56 percent since 1995 (see Table 1). Although most of these students are concentrated in the elementary school grades, 18 percent are enrolled in high school.

The Hispanic Community Foundation commissioned one of the few studies on the education achievement of this burgeoning Bay Area population. The report analyzed standardized test scores, dropout rates and college-prep course taking and found that Latinos experience significant gaps in educational

Table 1: Latino K-12 Public School Enrollment by Bay Area County

	1995	2005	% Change	% of 2005 Total Enrollment	# ELL Spanish-Speaking Students
Alameda	38,628	58,354	+51	27	28,113
Contra Costa	23,270	43,079	+85	26	20,970
Marin	3,318	5,528	+67	19	2,854
Napa	4,745	8,292	+75	42	4,746
San Francisco	12,956	12,851	-01	22	6,803
San Mateo	26,179	29,658	+13	34	14,828
Santa Clara	76,677	91,012	+19	36	42,929
Solano	10,562	18,556	+76	26	6,825
Sonoma	11,585	22,344	+93	31	14,387
Total Bay Area	207,920	289,674	+39	30	142,455
Total Statewide	2,118,028	3,003,521	+42	48	1,341,369

Source: California Department of Education

Figure 2: Racial Ethnic Distribution of San Francisco Bay Area K-12 Public School Enrollment

Source: California Department of Education

Note: The "Multiple /No Response" categories were not options in 1995

achievement compared with whites. For example, less than one-third of Bay Area Latino tenth graders scored at or above grade-level in mathematics compared with 60 percent of their white counterparts. This gap in math scores is also found among fourth and sixth graders; a similar pattern also exists in reading.³ The most recent results of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) also show significant disparities in pass rates between Bay Area Latinos and their Asian and white counterparts. In 2005-2006, only 48 percent of Latinos tested passed the mathematics part of the CAHSEE compared with 82 and 87 percent of whites and Asians respectively, and a similar gap is found in English-language arts exam.

The Majority of Latinos Graduate from Bay Area High Schools Unprepared for College Entry

The major requirement for entry into the University of California and California State University system is the "A-G" coursework series, a set of 15 courses across several academic subjects and electives. Students who pass all A-G required courses with a grade point average of a C or better meet the minimum requirements for admission to the CSU system while the UC recommends that students take additional courses in math, lab science, and foreign language. Standardized tests (SAT I, SAT II and ACT) are required for UC admissions, regardless of the eligibility pathway students choose to

pursue. Students who achieve a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher in their A-G courses do not need to take such tests to achieve CSU eligibility although they are highly recommended for admission to competitive majors and impacted CSU campuses.

The A-G coursework series is highly effective at narrowing the state's graduating class into a four-year college admissions pool. In 1985, only 26 percent of all public school graduates completed the A-G requirements with a grade of C or better; completion rates for Latinos and African-Americans were particularly low at 16 and 17 percent, respectively. Ten years later, more Latino graduates completed the A-G coursework series (23 percent) yet they were still less likely to do so in comparison to all graduates (35 percent). The A-G completion rate for Latinos and African-Americans has remained relatively flat since 1995, a time period when the state was purportedly mandated to ensure that "all California children are provided with the tools to compete in our society" in the wake of Proposition 209, a 1996 California ballot initiative that eliminated the use of race and gender in the state's public universities admissions' decisions. Finally, although more Latino high school seniors in California are taking the SAT I, they are less likely to do so in comparison to their Asian and white counterparts and they also achieve lower scores.⁴ Examining coursework patterns, grades, and standardized test scores, the California Postsecondary Education Commission estimates that despite experiencing a near doubling in

Table 2: Measures of College Preparation for Bay Area Counties

County	% of 2005 Graduates*			% of 2004-2005 Seniors Who Took SAT		
	Latinos	Non-Latinos	Gap	Latinos	Non-Latinos	Gap
Alameda	26	48	-22	25	55	-30
Contra Costa	16	42	-26	21	50	-29
Marin	16	58	-42	24	66	-42
Napa	15	33	-18	16	39	-23
San Francisco	37	58	-21	32	66	-34
San Mateo	21	52	-31	22	57	-35
Santa Clara	21	54	-33	19	63	-44
Solano	18	30	-12	20	37	-17
Sonoma	24	39	-15	15	39	-24
Total Bay Area	22	47	-25	21	54	-33
Total Statewide	24	42	-18	21	37	-16

Sources: California Postsecondary Education Commission; California Department of Education

*This analysis is restricted to the graduates of comprehensive, alternative, and continuation public high schools.

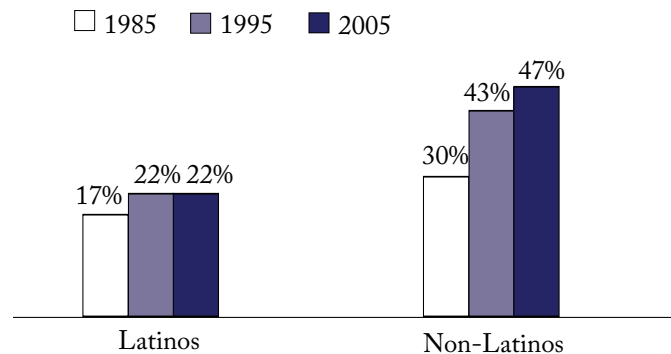
eligibility rates, only 6.5 percent of current Latino high school graduates achieve UC eligibility compared with 31 percent of Asians and 16 percent of whites. The Latino CSU eligibility rate is higher (16 percent) but has remained stagnant since 1990.⁵

Students who graduate from Bay Area public schools are more likely to complete the A-G coursework series in comparison to students from other regions of the state. For example, in 2005, 42 percent of Bay Area graduates completed the A-G requirements whereas only 36 percent of students statewide did so. Likewise, 46 percent of Bay Area seniors took the SAT I in comparison to 36 percent of students statewide. However, as the data in Table 2 reveal, there are large disparities in each of these measures of college preparation between Latinos and non-Latinos. Only 22 percent of Bay Area Latinos completed the A-G requirements in 2005, a full 25 percentage points lower than the A-G completion rate of non-Latinos, the majority of whom are Asians and whites. The difference in standardized test taking is even larger: only 21 percent of Bay Area Latino seniors attempted the SAT I compared with over 54 percent of non-Latinos. These patterns of racial-ethnic disparity are also visible throughout the region's counties. Historical data reveal that the A-G completion rates for non-Latino Bay Area graduates increased dramatically since 1985 but those of Latinos did not (see Figure 3). Instead, Latinos experienced only a slight increase in A-G completion

rates since 1985 and virtually no change since 1995.

The higher than average rates of four-year college preparation found among Bay Area students translates into higher than average four-year college entry rates (see Table 3).⁶ A total of 58,581 students graduated from a Bay Area public high school in 2005. Thirteen percent enrolled at a California State University campus as first-time freshmen in fall of that year and 11 percent enrolled in the University of California, resulting in a total four-year college entry rate of 24 percent. This entry rate is higher than the statewide rate of 18 percent.

Figure 3: A-G Completion Rates Among Bay Area Public High School Graduates*



Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission

*This analysis is restricted to the graduates of comprehensive, alternative, and continuation public high schools.

Table 3: Bay Area 2005 Public High School Graduates* and Fall 2005 Entry into the California State University and the University of California

	2005 Public High School Graduates	Fall 2005 First-Time Freshmen				Total Fall 2005 4-Year College Entry Rate
		California State University		University of California		
		N	Entry Rate	N	Entry Rate	
Asian/Pacific Islander	11,342	1,618	14	3,210	28	42
African American	5,070	548	11	132	3	14
Filipino	3,620	644	18	277	8	26
Latino	12,323	1,010	8	423	3	11
Native American	356	30	8	24	7	15
White	24,858	2,851	11	2,134	9	20
Total Bay Area	58,851	7,442	13	6,700	11	24
Total Statewide	349,611	37,930	11	24,048	7	18
Latinos Statewide	127,054	10,260	8	3,903	3	11

Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission

*This analysis is restricted to the graduates of comprehensive, alternative, and continuation public high schools.

However, the data also reveal severe racial-ethnic disparities in access to four-year colleges. Of the 12,323 Latinos who graduated from a Bay Area public high school in 2005, only 11 percent entered a California public four-year college that fall compared with 42 and 20 percent of their Asian and white counterparts. The gap in entry rates to the University of California is particularly large with only three percent of Latinos doing so compared with 28 percent of Asians and nine percent of whites. A higher proportion of Latinos enter the CSU system (eight percent) yet this is still smaller than the overall CSU entry rate of 13 percent. Finally, Bay Area Latinos' entry rates in the UC and CSU system as first-time freshmen are equal to Latinos' statewide entry rates.

A Solution to Inequality of Access to College Preparation

San Francisco Bay Area Latinos who graduate from public high schools have low rates of preparation for entry into four-year colleges and universities despite living in a region of the state that has higher than average A-G completion and SAT taking rates. Why would this be the case? A full discussion of the factors that influence student achievement is beyond the scope of this research brief. Instead, we focus our discussion on factors that are capable of being influenced by public policy – namely, school resources. Researchers with

UCLA/IDEA and UC ACCORD recently published two reports that illuminated the barriers to four-year college preparation that exist in California's public high schools: *College Opportunity Report 2006* and *Removing the Roadblocks*.⁷ In particular, they identified the following barriers:

- *insufficient counselors*: the average high school counselor in the state of California serves 506 students, nearly double the national average
- *high student-teacher ratios and significant mismatches between teacher training and assignment to college preparatory courses*: the student-teacher ratio is 21:1 compared with the average of 15:1 nationwide; 37 percent of high schools assign improperly qualified teachers to college preparatory math courses
- *lack of universal access of opportunity to take A-G courses*: over 50 percent of all high schools do not offer enough A-G courses for all enrolled students to take them

Nearly one-third of the state's public high schools face **all three barriers** and most of them are highly segregated with non-white students. Forty percent of Latino high school students attend severely segregated public schools and nearly two-thirds attend very large public high schools with average enrollments of more than 1,838 students.⁸ As such, Bay Area Latinos are very likely to attend schools with insufficient resources to prepare for college. Such disparities were illuminated

by student declarations in support of *Williams v. The State of California*, a class-action lawsuit that protested the deteriorating facilities, textbook and teacher shortages, and overcrowding in many public schools. In vivid detail, college-bound high school students enrolled in the state's lowest performing schools, many of them in the Bay Area, described the lack of A-G/Honors/AP courses, year-round school schedules that only offer college prep courses during certain tracks, and the week-long waits to see a school counselor.⁹

These barriers affect students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in profound ways because their families are not in a position to compensate for school shortcomings by advising them on which courses to take and purchasing college preparation services such as SAT coaching. Indeed, the reliance on institutional support for college preparation is particularly crucial for Latino students: in 2000, only 9 percent of Latino children in California age 0-5 had one parent with a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 46 percent of white children and 56 percent of Asian children the same age.¹⁰

Recent legislative efforts have sought to modify the state's high school graduation requirements to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to graduate from high school well prepared for both college entry and/or work. The most ambitious proposal thus far has been AB 1253, sponsored by Assembly Member Joe Coto (D-San Jose) in 2005. This bill proposed to align California's high school graduation curriculum requirements with the 15 A-G courses with an opt-out provision for students interested in attending a community college or receiving career technical education. The bill failed to pass the Assembly Committee on Appropriations and is not currently active. In the meantime, two school districts have aligned their graduation requirements with the A-G curriculum sequence in an effort to equalize opportunities and promote college access: the Los Angeles Unified School District, whose policy will affect students who begin ninth grade in 2008, and the San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) whose policy went into effect for students who graduated in 2002.¹¹

The result of this policy change at SJUSD is nothing short of remarkable. Beginning with the class of 2002, all students, with the exception of students pursuing

independent programs and those in special education, were required to meet the new set of graduation course requirements. The effect was seen immediately in 2002 when 65 percent of SJUSD graduates completed the A-G coursework series with a grade of C or better compared with only 37 percent the year prior. All racial-ethnic groups experienced a large increase in A-G completion rates including Latinos, whose rates had been hovering at less than 20 percent for many years. In 2001 only 19 percent of Latinos completed the A-G coursework series. In 2002, 44 percent of them did so. The SJUSD also experienced an increase in graduation rates since the implementation of this policy.¹²

Future Research

Low rates of A-G completion for Latinos graduating from Bay Area public high schools have dire implications for Latino access to four-year colleges and it is clear that the majority of college-bound Latinos will begin their studies at a local community college. While the community college may be a viable option for Latinos who wish to transfer to a four-year institution, studies show that only small proportions of community college students manage to transfer and Latinos are particularly underrepresented among those who do successfully navigate a community college. Students who enter a community college without sufficient preparation for college level coursework will likely spend time taking basic skills courses thus impeding transfer. Future research at the Center for Latino Policy Research will explore Latinos' experiences at the 25 community colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area region.

Notes

- 1 The 1970 population data retrieved from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission & Association of Bay Area Governments website <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/> on July 6, 2007. Population data for 1980, 1990, and 2005 retrieved from RAND California <http://ca.rand.org> on July 22, 2007.
- 2 See, for example, Hanak, E. & Baldassare, M. (Eds.). (2005). *California 2025: Taking on the Future* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California); Brady, H., Hout, M., & Stiles, J. (2005). *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in*

- California's Future*. (Berkeley: Survey Research Center, University of California).
- 3 Hispanic Community Foundation. (2000). *The State of Latino Education in the San Francisco Bay Area: A Crisis In Student Performance*. (San Francisco, CA). Available through the ERIC Documenting Reproduction Service: No. ED475032.
 - 4 College Board. (2005) *State Profile Report 2005: College-Bound Seniors, California*. (New York, NY).
 - 5 California Postsecondary Education Commission. (2005). *Are they Going? University Enrollment and Eligibility for African-Americans and Latinos*. (Commission Report FS 05-03). Sacramento, CA.
 - 6 Following the California Postsecondary Education Commission's methodology of calculating college-going rates, we limit our analysis to entry into California's public four-year colleges.
 - 7 Rogers, J., Terriquez, V., Valladares, S., and J. Oakes. (2006). *College Opportunity Report 2006: Roadblocks to College*. Oakes, J. Rogers, J., Silver, D., Valladares, S., Terriquez, V. McDonough, P., Renee, M. and M. Lipton. (2006). *Removing the Roadblocks: Fair College Opportunities for All California Students*. (Los Angeles: UC Accord/Institute for Democracy, Education and Access at the University of California).
 - 8 Fry, R. (2005). *The High Schools Hispanics Attend: Size and Other Key Characteristics*. (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center).
 - 9 Extensive documentation related to the case is available at <http://www.decentschools.org>.
 - 10 Reed, D. (2005). *Educational Resources and Outcomes in California, by Race and Ethnicity*. (San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California).
 - 11 See Dr. Julie Mendoza's April 6, 2007 seminar "Moving Beyond Policy Formulation to Implementation: A-G Accountability in Los Angeles Unified School District" at the Center for Latino Policy Research, University of California, Berkeley available for viewing at <http://clpr.berkeley.edu>.
 - 12 See Lin, B. (2006). *Access to A-G curriculum at San Jose Unified School District*. (Berkeley: Center for Latino Policy Research, University of California). Oakes et al. 2006. *Removing the Roadblocks*.

Data Sources

California Department of Education

Website <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>

- "County Enrollment by Ethnicity"
- "Number of English Learners by Language"
- "SAT I and ACT by Gender and Ethnicity: 2004-05"
- "California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Results for Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) by Gender and Ethnic Designation"

California Postsecondary Education Commission

Website <http://www.cpec.ca.gov>

- "Total Public High School Graduates and Total Public A-G Completions"
- "Enrollment of First-Time Freshmen age 19 and under in Public Institutions."

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CLPR FALL 2007 RESEARCH BRIEF

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Latinos constitute 30 percent of all students enrolled in San Francisco Bay Area public schools. Despite this, few studies have examined the prospects for higher education of Latino youth in the Bay Area. This research brief explores college preparation and entry among this fast growing racial-ethnic group.

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