

Improving Your Child's Education

A Guide for Latino Parents

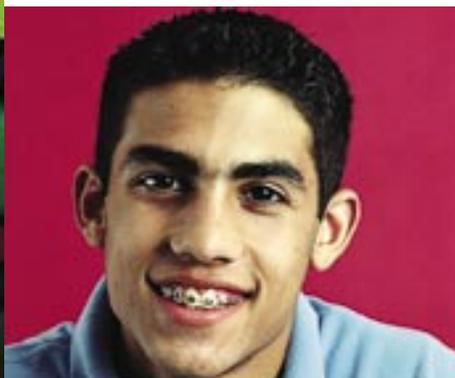


An informed and engaged parent is a powerful parent

Education is a basic right to which all children are entitled in the United States. There's a good reason for this: More than anything else, a solid education is the ticket to a better quality of life, including good jobs that pay decent wages and offer opportunities for advancement. And the benefits of education are more important today than they have ever been. Providing this education to every child will go a long way toward fulfilling America's promise of equal opportunity for all.

Parents play an important role in helping to make sure their children and all children get the education they need and deserve. Yet for many years, Latino parents have been excluded from the educational process, either because the school system simply does not know how to reach out to them or because Latino parents themselves feel intimidated by the system and did not get involved. Schools are public institutions and belong to us all. You have the right, indeed the responsibility, to go to your child's school and ask questions.

In this guide, we offer a number of suggestions for how you as a Latino parent can get involved and how you can better advocate



for the education of your children. We also offer information that can be turned into powerful tools for you to exercise your rights as an involved Latino parent.

High Expectations for Latino Youth: More than high school

More education means more choices in work and in life. Low paying jobs affect the whole family. Many Latino parents work two or three jobs at a time just to be able to pay the bills, making it harder for them to spend time with their spouses and children. Such jobs also lack important benefits like health insurance and paid vacation time that contribute a lot to the quality of family life.

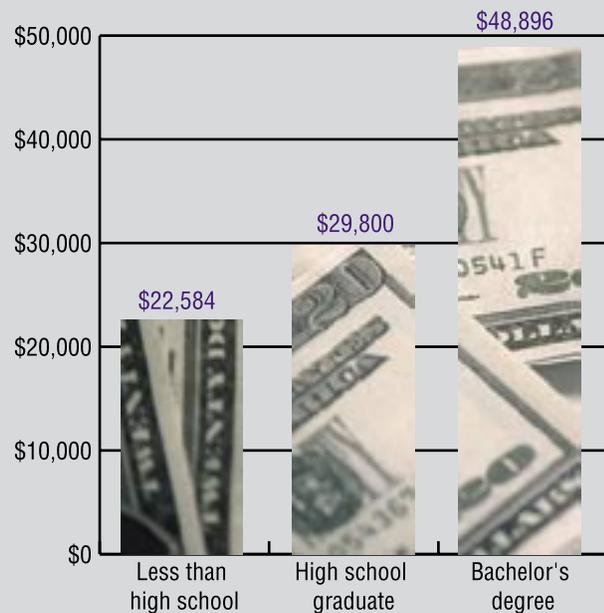
In today's economy, a high school degree is no longer good enough. Yes, high school graduates have an edge in the job market over those who dropped out before graduation. But adults with only a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a college degree. And unemployment is not the only problem: jobs for people who did not go to college pay less than they used to. Young adults with a high school diploma may earn close to \$2,000 more annually than their peers who left high school early. But those with just a high school diploma earn nearly \$20,000 less per year than those with a four year college degree.¹ Over a working life time, these dollars really add up. The first graph on this page shows the huge disparities in earnings between young adult workers who complete college and those who do not.

If your children do not get a college education, they will have a hard time finding jobs that pay a living wage or even provide benefits like health insurance as shown in the second graph. And their jobs will be less secure.

Clearly, the more education your children get, the more options they will have in life.



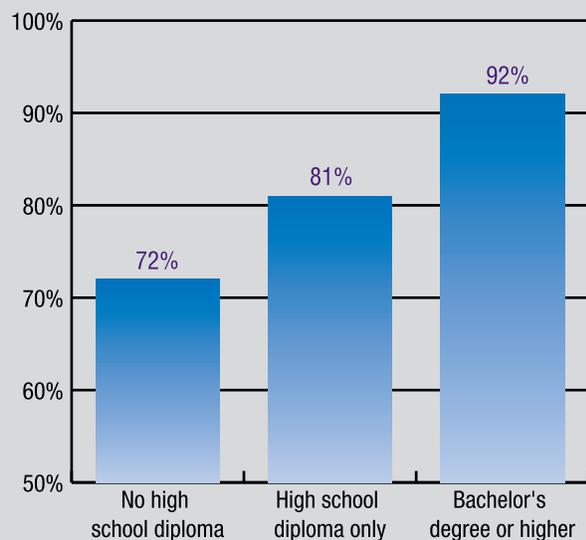
More Education= More Money Annual Earnings of Adults 25 Years and Over by Education Level, 2002



Source: Bureau of the Census; Bureau of Labor Statistics



More Education= Better Health Coverage Percent of the Population With Health Insurance for the Entire Year by Level of Educational Attainment, 2002



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2002 and 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplements www.census.gov

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March 2002.

A college education should be a priority for all Latino families. But while more and more young Americans overall are going to college, the percentage of Latino high school graduates continuing their education has not changed in 30 years. Only one-half of Latino high school graduates go to college, and fewer than half of these students earn a degree.² This is a serious problem because this means fewer opportunities in the future for the Latino community.

We must educate our Latino students at high levels so they can get more access to the best jobs. Consider this: Less than 4% of Science and Engineering professionals are Latino, while more than 75% are White.³

We can change these patterns. Latino parents must instill in their children the understanding that without a college degree they will not enjoy the same quality of life or be able to successfully compete with those who have one. And Latino parents must demand that schools prepare their children to succeed in college once they get there.

Data on Latino education⁴

The most recent census shows that at 40 million strong, Latinos represent the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority in the United States. But the education level of our largest minority group is in crisis. The system has left most Latino students behind. This is not just a problem for the Latino community, it is a problem

for the nation and we must take action to change it.

In this country, there exists an academic achievement gap between different groups of children. It exists because not all students in American schools receive their fair share of public education's resources. The result for Latino students is that in all academic areas, their performance lags behind their White peers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress—the nation's report card—shows that 57% of Latino 4th graders have not even been taught to a basic level in Reading and 53% of Latino 8th graders do not meet basic levels in Math performance. By age 17, Latino students have Math and Reading skills that are virtually the same as those of 13-year-old White students.⁵

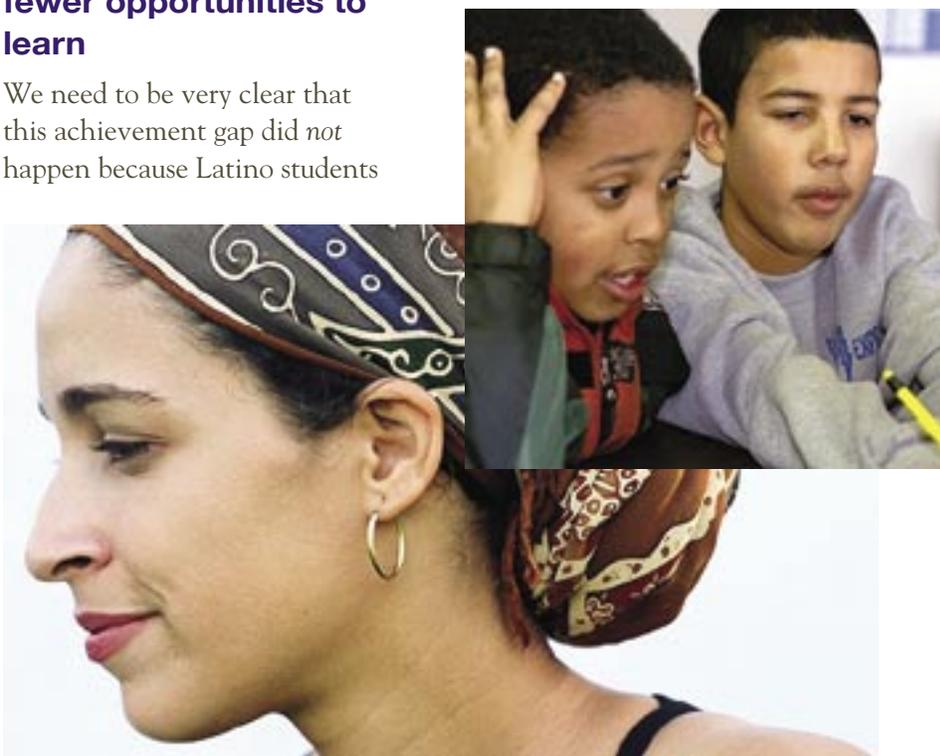
Latino students have fewer opportunities to learn

We need to be very clear that this achievement gap did *not* happen because Latino students

can't learn to the same levels as others. It happened because right now, Latino students get less of everything research shows is vital to learning: They get **fewer qualified teachers, weaker curriculums, and less money for their schools.** As parents, you need to fight for your kids to get what they deserve. A new federal law called No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sets the goal for all students, including Latino students, to meet state standards in Mathematics and Reading by the year 2014. In doing so, it also gives parents the tools they need to help make sure their students succeed.

Teacher quality⁶

The evidence on teacher quality is clear: Good teachers help students make enormous achievement gains. In fact, one respected researcher has concluded that if we could provide five strong teachers



² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, various years; Berkner, He, Cataldi, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-96 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Six Years Later*, U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2002.

³ BEST: Building Engineering and Science Talent: <http://www.bestworkforce.org/>

⁴ For more information on data on Latino education you can download our report and power point presentation on *Latino Achievement in America*: <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/spanish+translated.htm>

⁵ NAEP 1999 Long Term Trends Summary Tables (Online)

⁶ For more information on teacher quality you can download our report *The Real Value of Teachers*: <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/5704CBA6-CE12-46D0-A852-D2E2B4638885/0/Spring04.pdf>

in a row to our low-income students, we could catch these students up on Reading and Math tests.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to take steps to make sure that all students are taught by qualified teachers and that all students get their fair share of experienced teachers. It also gives parents the right to know the qualifications of their child's teachers.

Ask your school's principal about the qualifications of your child's teacher and the teachers in the school. Schools have to notify you if your child is taught by an unqualified teacher for four weeks or more in a row. Find out what standards your state uses to decide if teachers are qualified. Then ask what's being done to help your schools get the teachers they need. This information may be difficult to get, but it is very important, so don't give up. Without pressure from parents and community members, some students will never get access to the best teachers.

Challenging Curriculum and Courses⁷

To be well-prepared either for college or work, students need to be challenged with a rigorous curriculum from the first day of school. Unfortunately, too many Latino students are put in less challenging classes where they don't develop the skills they need to succeed after high school, regardless of their goals for the future. For example, only 31% of Latino students complete advanced Math courses in high

school, compared with 47% of White students and 69% of Asian students.⁸

And because more and more jobs require a strong background in Math, our Latino students who do not take these courses in high school will not have access to the best jobs once they graduate.

The best way to prepare Latino students is to make sure they get a strong high school education that includes high-level Math and Science classes. Many studies have shown that when students are placed in challenging classes in middle and high school, they learn more and fail less often. Even the students who haven't done well in school in the past do better when they are put in the tougher courses.

For instance, Algebra II is the strongest predictor of whether Latino students will succeed in college or not. That is why we must make sure ALL our Latino students take Algebra II. Taking this course helps guarantee success

beyond college; researchers have found a strong relationship between Algebra II and later earnings.

As a Latino parent, there are many ways to find out if your children have access to the classes they will need to succeed. Do all students have Algebra I by 9th grade? Are students assigned to a curriculum that prepares them for college or other opportunities after high school? Are there Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the high school, and are they available to all students?

Funding⁹

Most states give less money to the schools educating the highest proportion of low-income students and students of color. Nationally,



⁷ For more information on challenging curriculum and courses you can download our report *A New Core Curriculum for All*: http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/26923A64-4266-444B-99ED-2A6D5F14061F/0/k16_winter2003.pdf

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics: *The Condition of Education 2004*.

⁹ For more information on funding you can download our report *The Funding Gap*: <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/EE004C0A-D7B8-40A6-8A03-1F26B8228502/0/funding2003.pdf>

schools with large numbers of minority students receive, on average, \$797 less per student in state and local money than the schools educating the fewest. That's not fair. As we work to make sure all children meet high standards, it will be important to make sure all schools have the resources they need to make this goal a reality.

What Latino parents can do

Latino parents can do a lot to help their own child's performance as well as working with teachers, administrators and other parents to help improve their child's school. First, Latino parents need to know what their rights are regarding their child's education.

But there are other things that they can do at home to help their child succeed.

Know your rights¹⁰

There's no question that parents can be an important force in accelerating school improvement. A federal law called No Child Left Behind can help Latino parents become stronger advocates,

Using No Child Left Behind to help your child:

This powerful new law guarantees many rights to Latino parents, including:

1. Clear, honest information about your child and your child's school, district and state:

- You have the right to know how your child is performing in Mathematics and Reading/Language Arts, and any specific needs your child may have.
- You have the right to know how your school is doing overall in comparison to the state academic standards and whether it is meeting annual state goals for student learning, called "Adequate Yearly Progress" or AYP.
- You have the right to information about your school's performance with groups of students, including Latino students and those learning English. If any of these groups is not making Adequate Yearly Progress, the school must focus on making sure they will.
- You have the right to know if your child is being taught by a teacher who is not qualified. Do not hesitate to ask your school principal about your child's teacher's qualifications.
- You have the right to information in Spanish if there are a significant number of Spanish-speaking parents in your school district.

2. Options to obtain better educational opportunities or services for your child:

- NCLB provides funds for some students to transfer to higher-performing schools or get tutoring to raise their academic achievement. Ask your school principal whether NCLB gives your child the right to transfer or receive after school tutoring. Remember: parents do not have to pay for this service – the school district already receives federal funds for this purpose.
- If you request them, the school must have regular meetings with you to discuss your concerns about your child's education.

3. More options and better control for parents of English-language learners:

- If your child is placed in a special program to learn English, the school has to notify you of the following: 1) your child's level of English proficiency; 2) a description of the program for teaching them English as well as any other available programs; 3) a timetable for your child to be ready to join the regular English-language program; and 4) the expected high school graduation rate of students placed in the special program to learn English.
- If your child is not making adequate progress toward full English proficiency, you must be notified within 30 days so you can explore other options.
- If you are not satisfied with the English learning program at your child's school, you can choose another or you can choose to have your child placed in the regular academic program.

Experience shows that most school systems and schools won't change the way they do business without outside help and pressure. No Child Left Behind provides some leverage for parents and advocates. Schools and school districts benefit when parents are informed advocates

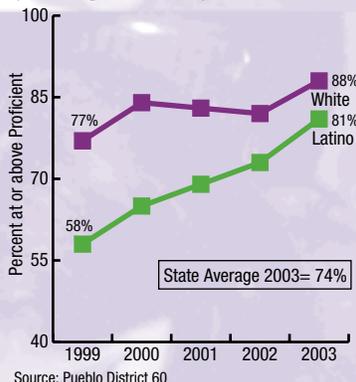
Latino children will rise to the challenge when it's presented to them

We mentioned that the education of Latinos in this country is in a crisis. Fortunately, we also know that Latino students will perform at high levels when they receive their fair share of opportunities. There are a large number of schools all around the nation that have a majority of Latino students, are located in poor *barrios*, and are outperforming most of the schools in their state. The same happens with school districts that are showing that this task is doable. A good example is Pueblo, Colorado, a district with 57% of Latino students and 60% poor students. In five years this district went from having 58% of its 3rd grade Latino students reading proficiently to 81%. And not only that, Pueblo also closed the gap from nearly 20 percentage points in 1999 to only 7 percentage points in 2003.

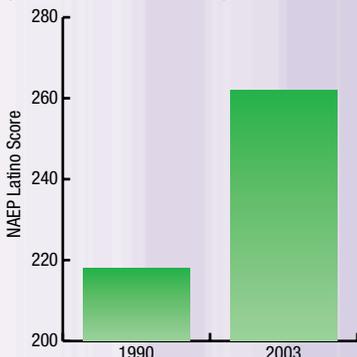
How did Pueblo deliver those gains? The school district makes sure that the poor and Latino students who need the most help get some of the strongest and most experienced teachers. It uses data, such as students' test scores, to uncover which kids are struggling and need extra assistance in the classroom.

And the district invests a lot of money training teachers to do their jobs better. Between 1998 and 2002 alone, Pueblo spent \$2 million to train teachers on reading instruction.

Pueblo, CO:
Raising Achievement for Students While Narrowing Gaps (Reading 3rd Grade)



North Carolina:
Big Gains for Latino Students While Closing the Achievement Gap (NAEP Math 8th Grade)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Entire states also are doing a solid job educating their Latino children. In North Carolina, Latino 8th graders' performance on a key national Math test (NAEP) jumped by 45 points between 1990 and 2003—roughly equivalent to a gain of four and a half years worth of learning. At the same time, the state narrowed the gap between White and Latino students by 13 points.

We know our Latino students can achieve at high levels; plenty of examples all around the nation prove it. As a Latino parent, you must get involved to make sure your children receive the right opportunities to make this possible.

but the law won't meet its full potential for improving schools without parent and community groups organizing and pushing to make sure that policies are implemented according to the intent of the law. When Latino parents combine facts with their passion to improve their child's education, they become a powerful force.

No Child Left Behind provides data (hard facts) that Latino parents can use to evaluate the academic progress of their children. Each school district is required to develop an effective process for encouraging parental involvement.

Understanding the facts: Basics of data for parents

As you can see from the NCLB table on page 5, schools will produce lots of data that provides facts about school performance. Understanding how well students are learning is an important part of being able to help your school become better. But it is only part of the picture. Latino parents need to know whether their children are getting enough help and support from their school. The first thing we need to emphasize is that you should not be intimidated by data. Data is just a fancy word for "information." You do not have to be a statistician or an expert in Math to understand your school's data. Most of it is very simple and easy to comprehend.

The federal law provides a lot of the basic information, but it is *not* all of the data you'll need. You will also need to know:

- whether Latino students are being placed in the high-level classes that will help them develop the skills they need.
- whether Latino students are being disproportionately placed in special education programs or being placed out of school altogether through suspension.
- whether your district is receiving its fair share of education dollars.
- whether other schools in your area are succeeding with students like yours.

A clear, accurate, and thorough picture, one based on the data, is the only way to communicate the truth about our schools, the truth about who's learning—and who's not being given the opportunity to learn. Knowing the truth is the only way we can begin to improve. This work won't be easy, but it needs to be done. Latino children deserve good schools.

The facts you uncover may be difficult, even painful, for people to hear. It may reveal significant differences in achievement and opportunity between students of different races and income levels. It may challenge people's long-held notions about what's going on in their schools, and force people to confront that, sometimes, schools have not served Latino students very well. It may even lead some people, those who haven't heard all the facts, to incorrectly place the responsibility for the achievement gap on low-income and minority students, rather than on the

schools and districts that have failed to give them what they need to be successful. But until your community confronts and understands these facts, you cannot move forward and improve your schools.

This task is doable

Schools have it in their power to educate all children to high standards, and it is their responsibility to do so. Indeed, every day a large number of schools in the United States prove that this can be done. It takes hard work, focus and dedication, but schools that have persistent achievement gaps can and must change their practices.

If you don't think your school is doing enough for Latino students, this guide has described things

you can do, beginning with the data. Armed with the facts, Latino parents and schools can work together to:

- Change attitudes about why some children are not meeting standards;
- Change policies to make sure that all school systems are 100% focused on getting 100% of their students to high standards; and
- Change practices within schools to make sure that all Latino children are given a fair opportunity to learn.

Most institutions are reluctant to change on their own. But public schools are *your* schools. Latino parents, community leaders and *you* have the power to change them.

Glossary

Achievement Gap- The difference in school achievement between different groups of students, such as racial/ethnic groups, family income levels, or special needs.

Advanced Placement (AP®) Courses- College-level courses designed by the College Board and offered in high schools. If students do well on the AP test, they can earn college credits and save time and money when they get to college.

AYP/Adequate Yearly Progress- A signaling system to tell whether schools are on-track to teach all students what they need to know in each school year.

College-Prep Curriculum- The sequence of challenging courses that prepares students for college after high school.

Curriculum- The subject matter, including lessons, units, tests and assignments that teachers cover with students over a school year.

Data- Facts, usually represented by numbers; information.

Opportunity Gap- Differences in educational resources available to different schools and students, especially such resources as, qualified teachers, curriculum and money.

State Standards- What each state expects students to learn and be able to do at each grade level in the core content areas.

What parents can do

Helping your child

- Talk to your children. Communication is important to understand what your child has to say about his or her education, teacher, homework, school and to show that their education is important.
- Monitor your child's homework. As a parent you do not necessarily have to understand or be able to explain all the assignments that your children receive, but you can monitor your child to make sure they are really working and understanding the homework.
- Read to your child or have your child read to you.
- Know your child's teachers and find out their qualifications and experience.
- Know what is expected of your child in each class and whether your child is meeting these expectations.
- Make sure your children are in the most challenging classes that will prepare them to succeed in college and work.
- Ask for or acquire on your own a copy of the state academic standards for each subject, use them to make sure you know what your child is expected to learn in school.
- Ask for a syllabus or outline of the work your child will receive during the year.

Work with other parents to help your child's school

- There is power in numbers, talk to other parents about the education your children are receiving. Exchange ideas, information and concerns about your schools.
- Find out how students are placed in certain classes and work towards getting all Latino students placed in high-level classes.
- Find out how the district assign teachers and work towards making sure all teachers are highly qualified. Ask the school superintendent and school board members what's being done to get your school more qualified and experienced teachers.
- Use data, such as test score results, to understand how well your schools are performing with Latino students
- Ask to see school improvement plans. Is the school district doing enough to help your schools improve achievement?

We are grateful to the Educational & Productivity Solutions business of Texas Instruments Incorporated for Education whose funding supported this project.

Hector Sanchez, Author
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About The Education Trust

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high academic achievement for all students, at all levels—kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African American, Latino, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side-by-side with policy makers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders—in cities and towns across the country—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.

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