

The Education Landscape of Latino Students in the Central San Joaquin Valley & California

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I. Introduction

Latinos comprised 39% of the California state population in 2014 and are expected to constitute over 41% by the year 2020 (California Senate Office of Research, 2014). Latino students in California continue to experience unprecedented demographic growth, yet remain largely underserved throughout the P-20 public education continuum. Latino students are more likely to attend schools with fewer resources, live in segregated communities, high teacher turnover rates, have parents with less than a high school education, and come from poverty (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Contreras, 2011).

Inequities throughout the P-20 education continuum, with respect to access to equitable high quality schooling and resources has led to uneven outcomes for

Latino students with respect to passing rates on the California exit exam, drop out rates, college readiness, college transition, and degree completion. Latino students are making the lowest gains in educational attainment despite the fact that the majority of the K-12 system is now made up of Latino students.

And while Latino students have historically struggled for educational equity across the Southwest and United States (Menchaca & Valencia, 1990; Donato, 1997) the current critical mass of Latino students in California will be the tax base of the state in the coming years, creating an urgent situation to ensure the future labor force is highly educated and skilled to meet the demands of a complex global economy. The fate of Latino students in California is therefore intertwined with the fate of the entire state. This presents a unique opportunity for Latino leaders within the education system to lend their expertise and create collaborative efforts that accelerate engagement, learning, achievement, and ultimately college transition, success and completion.

Such challenges require targeted efforts among school, district, county, state and national leaders to intervene and alter this pathway before another generation is lost to the cycle of poverty and limited generational mobility (Contreras, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Telles & Martinez, 2009). The primary challenge before all California residents is to ensure its entire state population has access to a quality public education and postsecondary opportunity, pathways that lead to economic sustainability and community mobility.



This commissioned paper provides a brief overview of key challenges facing Latino students in the public education system in California today, with an additional emphasis on the San Joaquin Central Valley counties. The counties include Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare. It is intended to serve as a primer for conversation, debate, dialogue and creating viable institutional and policy solutions aimed at improving P-20 education services for Latino students.

II. Background on Latinos in California

According to the U.S. Census, 20-24.9 percent of Latinos in the United States lived in poverty in 2011. This story bears out in California, the state with the largest concentration of Mexican/Latino residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The greatest growth in poverty among youth under the age of 18 in California and the United States is among Latino children (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). In addition, the greatest growth in Latino childbirths is to young Latina single mothers, 53.3% nationally, second to African Americans at 73% (U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). This emerging family structure places a challenge on the single parent and family network, as well as social services to help compensate for the resources needed to raise children in today's society. Children born to young single mothers are more likely to have higher poverty rates, low enrollment in pre-school rates, greater behavioral issues, and challenges in kindergarten and early grades, setting a pathway for difficulty in school, particularly for children in need of EL services in schools (Garcia & Frede, 2010).

Table 1 shows 41% of Latino children in 2013, a figure that has steadily been increasing and mirrors what is happening with Latinos nation-wide. In addition, Latinos in California are second to Black residents in California in the percentage of children born in single-parent families from 2009-2013. Both communities struggle with the number of teen mothers having children and the ability of these young women to successfully integrate into the work force or follow postsecondary pathways.

Table 1: California Children in Single-Parent Families by Race, 2009-2013

Location	Race	Data Type	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
California	American Indian	Number	S	S	S	30,000	25,000
		Percent	S	S	S	46%	43%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	Number	176,000	187,000	194,000	191,000	181,000
		Percent	18%	19%	19%	19%	18%
	Black/African American	Number	341,000	321,000	320,000	313,000	314,000
		Percent	65%	64%	64%	64%	66%
Latino		Number	1,692,000	1,755,000	1,822,000	1,826,000	1,851,000
		Percent	38%	39%	40%	40%	41%
Non-Hispanic White		Number	604,000	574,000	592,000	580,000	571,000
		Percent	23%	23%	25%	24%	25%
Total		Number	2,914,000	2,945,000	3,041,000	3,023,000	3,030,000
		Percent	32%	33%	34%	34%	35%
Two or more races		Number	208,000	221,000	229,000	240,000	256,000
		Percent	33%	33%	34%	35%	35%

Source: Kids Count Data, based on the Population Reference Bureau from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey.

In addition to the challenges presented by having a high percentage of new Latino births to single parent households, Latinos in California generally face significant challenges when it comes to economic mobility, stability, home ownership, and disposable income. Table 2 shows the percent of children who are in households where the primary breadwinner lacks a high school diploma. In 2013, 39% of Latino children, the highest across all of the ethnic groups examined, were in household where the head lacked a high school diploma. In addition to having economic implications, these data also illuminate the limited amount of “college knowledge” Latino families possess in order to help their children plan early for college and enroll in the necessary courses and pathway.

Table 2: Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma by race and ethnicity, 2013

California	American Indian	Number	21,000	21,000	19,000	18,000	18,000
		Percent	29%	28%	25%	25%	28%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	Number	115,000	120,000	113,000	107,000	101,000
		Percent	12%	11%	11%	10%	10%
	Black or African American	Number	63,000	60,000	60,000	58,000	56,000
		Percent	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%
	Latino	Number	2,077,000	2,048,000	1,974,000	1,968,000	1,872,000
		Percent	44%	43%	41%	41%	39%
	Non-Hispanic White	Number	139,000	128,000	101,000	117,000	100,000
		Percent	5%	5%	4%	5%	4%
	Two or more races	Number	63,000	70,000	76,000	69,000	71,000
		Percent	10%	10%	11%	10%	9%
	Total	Number	2,410,000	2,374,000	2,271,000	2,270,000	2,146,000
		Percent	26%	26%	25%	25%	23%

Data Source: Population Reference Bureau's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. The American Community Survey 2005-2013.

Because of the historic and current low education levels of Latino residents in California, and limited access to financial capital, Latino families struggle economically. In 2013 for example, the median family income in households with children for Latinos was \$40,600 compared to Whites at \$95,800 and Asian Americans who had a median income of \$96,000, the highest of all ethnic groups. The gap between Latinos and Whites and Asians is over \$50,000 in median income, more than the average income for these households altogether.

Latinos in California also have the largest families, which further diminishes disposable income and the ability of Latino parents to offer additional academic supports or tools such as access to the latest technology, access to organized sports, individual music teachers or tutors, academic tutors outside of school if needed, or college coaches for example. Thus, these significantly lower household income levels presented in Table 2 conveys the inequities present between Latinos and other families even before students enter the school system, and challenges for parents as their children progress through the school system, where parents are increasingly asked to pay for school supplies, field trips, or classroom resources.

Table 3: Median family income among households with children by race and ethnicity, California 2013

American Indian	\$44,600
Asian and Pacific Islander	\$96,000
Black or African American	\$36,400
Hispanic or Latino	\$40,600
Non-Hispanic White	\$95,800
Two or more races	\$63,200
Total	\$61,400

Data Source: Population Reference Bureau's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. The American Community Survey 2005-2013.

III. A Profile of Latino students in California

Latino students at every stage of the P-20 education continuum lag behind their peers. Early childhood education is a critical aspect of the education system, because children who do not attend any form of Pre-K start their public education system already behind their peers with respect to their knowledge of kindergarten concepts, and are less acclimated to the social and academic environment present in school that is highly structured and demanding (Garcia & Gonzales, 2006; Garcia & Frede, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

Table 4: Children Ages 3-5 *Not Enrolled in Preschool or Kindergarten* (Regions of 10,000 Residents or More): -2013

	Percent
California	38.4%
Fresno County	45.1%
Kern County	50.5%
Kings County	NA
Madera County	46.8%
Merced County	46.4%
San Joaquin County	44.2%
Stanislaus County	47.6%
Tulare County	45.6%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 3 to 5 not enrolled in preschool or kindergarten.

Data Source: [As cited on kidsdata.org](#), Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey files (Mar. 2015).

The data for 3 and 4 year olds who are enrolled in preschool in 2014, among the data that is available for six of the San Joaquin Central Valley counties for Latino students, looks even worse than the 3-5 year olds, as five-year olds are likely to enroll in kindergarten. Thus, across all of the

counties examined in the San Joaquin Central Valley, the data for 3-4 year olds enrolled is lower than the state average at 40 percent.

Table 5: Children enrolled in Preschool, by Race/Ethnicity & County, 3-4 Year olds, (Percent) 2014

	CA	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	San Joaquin	Stanislaus	Tulare
Latino	40	34	28	NA	NA	29	35	34	47
White	57	35	33	NA	NA	NA	50	44	
African American	51	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Asian American	55	13	NA	NA	NA	NA	28	NA	NA
Other	58	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

NOTE: NA means Not Available.

One of the issues that is also a challenge for counties and school leaders alike is the relatively large proportion of Latino students that are in the foster care system. This figure has been steadily increasing over the past decade across California and among Latino children. Latinos now represent the largest number of children in foster care across all eight San Joaquin Central Valley counties examined.

Children in foster care tend to have greater challenges in the school system, ranging from academic challenges to instability in their home environment due to shifts in placement. Thus these students require additional services and attention to assist them in schools and provide them with support needed for academic integration and success (Merdinger, et. al., 2005).

Table 6: Number of Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity: 2014

California	CA	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	San Joaquin	Stanislaus	Tulare
African American/Black	13,985	339	196	47	27	75	361	65	46
American Indian/Alaska Native	844	54	5	8	9	4	4	6	13
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,432	59	17	8	1	23	59	30	4
Latino	31,230	1,315	934	260	212	391	724	349	717
White	14,498	362	607	89	91	158	413	325	286
Total Children in Foster Care	62,097	2,129	1,761	412	341	651	1,567	775	1,067

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) KIDS COUNT DataCenter. Available: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>

The foster care data also presents a challenge for schools, which become de facto homes or family structures for foster care youth. Foster care youth often require financial support, emotional support, and have lived or live with home instability depending on their foster care provider. Foster teens in youth facilities for example have well documented challenges in school, making college transition and work force integration even more difficult to achieve for this population (Danielson & Lee, 2010).

IV. Latino Students in the K-12 System

Latino students constitute 54 percent of all students in California’s public schools and are projected to comprise well over 60 percent of the student population in the next ten years. Latino students also comprise 84.3 percent of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the state, as the language most frequently spoken among the ELL population is Spanish (California Department of Education, 2015) and 54.4% of students in Special Education programs (KidData.org, 2015). Numerous studies have documented the overrepresentation of Latino students in Special Education (Artiles, 1994; Artiles, et. al., 2002).

Approximately 60% of all students are enrolled in the state free/reduced lunch program (California Department of Education, 2014). Since 38% of Latino youth lived in poverty in California in 2014 (KidData.org), it is no wonder that Latino students constitute a sizable proportion of the free/reduced lunch program in the state.

Teacher Diversity

Although California has witnessed unprecedented demographic growth in the proportion of Latino residents and students in the state, diversity within the teaching population has not kept pace with the state’s diverse resident base. For example, in 2013, Latino teachers represented 18.1 percent of all teachers in CA and White teachers represented 66.4 percent. Increasing teacher diversity is one factor that may have an impact of the educational experiences of Latino children. Researchers have found that teachers from minority or diverse backgrounds are less likely to resort to expulsion (King, 1991).

Table 7: Ethnic distribution of public school teachers in California, 2012–13

Ethnicity	Number of Male Teachers	Number of Female Teachers	Total	Total Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	481	1,065	1,546	.005
Asian	3,383	11,376	14,758	.052
Pacific Islander	260	669	929	.003
Filipino	1,033	2,967	4,000	.014
Hispanic or Latino	14,276	36,913	51,188	18.1
African American	3,370	7,897	11,267	.04
White (not Hispanic)	51,158	136,885	188,027	66.4
Two or More Races Not Hispanic	627	1,573	2,200	.008
No Response	2,682	6,731	9,413	.03
Total*	77,231	205,978	283,186	100

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) KIDS COUNT DataCenter. Available: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>*Some totals in the Public School Teachers table may not match due to difference in reporting strategy.

In addition to evidence that diverse teachers help to raise minority student achievement, researchers have found that teachers of color also have positive effects on the classroom

experience and the overall educational environment that diverse students are exposed to in school (King, 1991; Delpit, 1988; McKnown & Weinstein, 2008). Irizarry (2007) explains how “Teachers of color bring many benefits to the classroom that go beyond their racial or ethnic identification.” (p. 2).

Sonia Nieto (1999, 2005) in her seminal work in the field of education, *Why We Teach*, argued that teachers of color have often experienced similar alienation, marginalization or even discrimination in their own schooling experience and are therefore able to relate to diverse students in ways that many White teachers cannot (Nieto, 1999, 2005). In addition, in her book that examines the experiences of over twenty teachers of color in K-12 settings, she concludes that the cultural identification in addition to relatable experiences as youth enable minority teachers to relate to their students on multiple levels (Nieto, 1999, 2005).

Irvine (2003) discusses how many teachers of color serve as what she calls “cultural translators and cultural brokers” for diverse students in their classrooms. They tend to be knowledgeable, sensitive, and comfortable with students’ language, style of presentation, community values, traditions, rituals, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms. She further argues how many teachers of color have valuable insight into the cultures of their students. Based on their experiences, this particular group of teachers is often well aware of the social, cultural and economic realities faced by their students in communities of color. This insight and first hand knowledge is used to inform their pedagogical approaches and overall teaching practice.

Teachers of color are also more likely to feel confident and comfortable reaching out to diverse families. Latino teachers, many of whom are bilingual, have an added benefit of being able to relate to families both culturally and linguistically. In addition, the Latino teachers often themselves as “connected to the Latino community, going to the same church, cultural celebrations,” and as having a shared goal for their children to do well in school and go on to college (Contreras, et. al., 2015).

Academic Success & Access to Curriculum

A student who is not reading at grade level by third grade is four times less likely to graduate high school by age 19 (Hernandez, 2012), and likely to have academic difficulty throughout his or her schooling experience. Thus, emphasis on aligning Pre-K to grades K-3 are critical for Latino students who have consistently low reading scores across all grades, including third grade compared to the California state average.

Table 8: Third Graders Reading at Grade Level, by County and Race/Ethnicity, 2013 (Percent)

California	CA	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	San Joaquin	Stanislaus	Tulare
ALL	46	42	36	40	32	41	34	40	34
Latino	33	35	30	32	27	36	24	32	31
White	62	67	50	60	48	59	49	52	50
African American	34	29	29	30	28	38	25	35	32
Asian	68	48	52	NA	NA	50	45	52	43
Other	58	54	42	50	38	50	42	46	41

Source: Children Now, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>, 2013.

The pattern of low achievement in content knowledge continues into the 8th grade, most evident in 8th grade math scores. In 2013, 85% of Latino 8th graders scored below proficient in math achievement. Math achievement in middle school is a predictor of college enrollment, persistence and success (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Contreras, 2011).

Table 9 shows the percent of 8th graders who scored below proficient in math achievement, and both Latinos and African American students had the lowest scores since 2005. The data is slightly improving for Latino students, however, there is a wide disparity in achievement between Latino 8th grade students and their White and Asian counterparts. Poverty aside, it calls into question the climate for learning exists in the P-12 system that perpetuates persistent gaps in achievement. Are there distinct opportunities to learn that our outdated K-12 system is not addressing effectively?

Table 9: Eighth graders who scored below proficient math achievement level by race, Select years, 2005-2013

Location	Race	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
California	White	66%	61%	61%	59%	58%
	Black or African American	93%	90%	90%	88%	89%
	Hispanic or Latino	91%	90%	89%	87%	85%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	55%	54%	54%	50%	41%
	American Indian	S	83%	S	S	S
	Two or more races	66%	S	S	S	45%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) KIDS COUNT DataCenter. Available: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>

Testing

Testing remains a critical issue throughout the academic pipeline for Latino students. Latinos have consistently lower test scores at every stage of the K-12 schooling experience than their White and Asian American peers, scoring below proficient in content areas of Math, English, and Science. In particular, Spanish-Speaking ELL students are the lowest scoring group of students, across all academic content areas. Gaps in achievement can be attributed to limited access to quality pre-K and persistent inequities in investment and that carry on in the K-12 schooling experience. The high stakes nature of testing suggests that such practices, where many low resource schools resort to prescribed curriculum or “teaching to the test” practices, as seen in the case of NCLB (Valenzuela, 1999).

Table 10: California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Results for Mathematics and English-Language Arts (ELA) Race/Ethnicity (Combined 2014) for (Grade 10) State Report, 2012

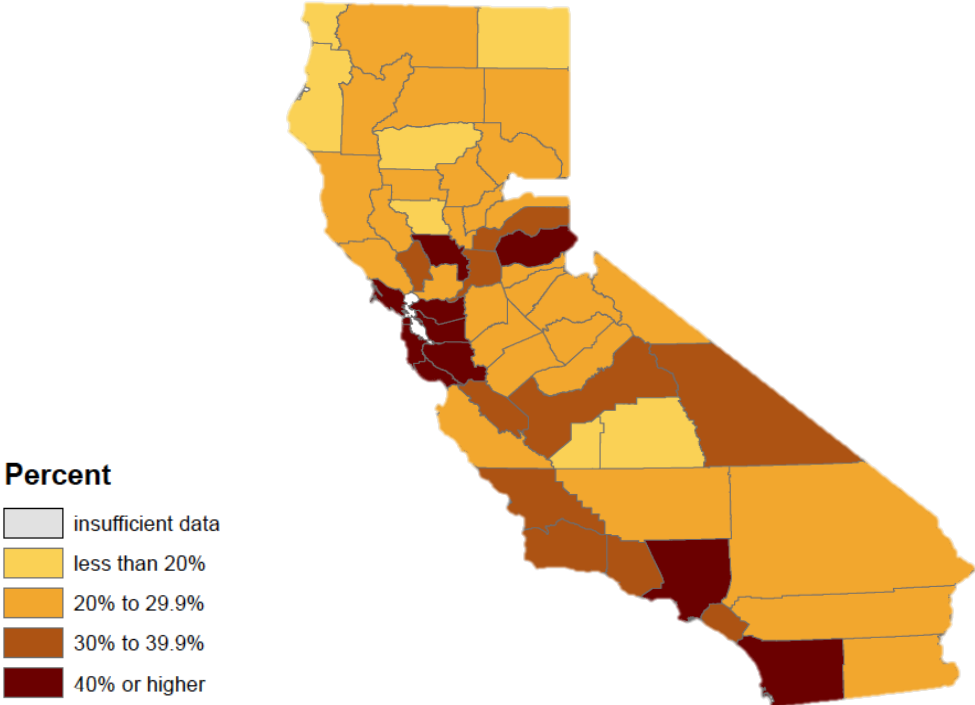
Tested or Passing	Subject	All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Filipino	Latino	Black	White
# Tested	Math	458,297	3,048	40,066	2,630	13,611	236,598	28,906	120,240
Passing	Math	389,909 (85%)	2,403 (79%)	38,694 (97%)	2,219 (84%)	12,840 (94%)	190,432 (80%)	20,908 (72%)	110,836 (92%)
# Tested	ELA	460,398	3,080	40,155	2,646	13,639	237,604	29,119	120,849
Passing	ELA	383,20 (83%)	2,410 (78%)	36,724 (91%)	2,154 (81%)	12,562 (92%)	185,427 (78%)	21,204 (73%)	111,100 (92%)

Source: California Department of Education, 2012.

College & Career Readiness

Latino students continue to lack access and preparedness for enrolling in a rigorous curriculum, such as an honors track, AP classes, or an A-G curriculum by the time they reach high school. As a result, fewer Latinos, when compared to their White and Asian American peers in the same graduating cohorts, complete the courses necessary to be eligible for the CSU or UC systems. As a result, the majority of Latino students that graduate on time and immediately transition to college (25% of all high school graduates), transition first to the community college sector. Figure 1 conveys the percent of recent high school graduates completing A-G courses by county in California.

Figure 1
Percent of Recent High School Graduates Completing A-G Courses, by County 2014



Source: Public Policy Institute of California, 2014.

The data for the San Joaquin Central Valley according to Children Now in particular shows the percent of students ready for college level math in comparison to the overall pool of college-goers in California. Uneven outcomes in college readiness exist across the eight counties examined,

with 58 percent of Latinos in Stanislaus County ready for college level math compared to Fresno County at 41%. The pool of college goers is already very small, and these data convey how Latinos arrive to the steps of colleges with academic needs and behind their White and Asian American peers. Thus, the inequitable student outcomes witnessed at critical stages merely continues all the way to and through the halls of higher education.

Table 11: Students Who are ready for College Level Math, by County and Race/Ethnicity, 2013 (Percent)

Ethnicity	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	San Joaquin	Stanislaus	Tulare
Latino	41	49	33	37	51	42	58	51
White	66	60	47	53	62	57	67	63
Black	36	45	41	36	56	43	54	47
Asian	59	79	NA	NA	NA	64	74	NA
Other	48	NA	NA	NA	NA	47	59	69

Source: Children Now, California County Scorecard, 2015.

Transition to College

The transition to college rates among Latino students are far lower than the proportion that Latino students constitute in the K-12 population, and most students transition into the California community colleges as their entry point into higher education. Table 12 shows that 39% of Latinos transitioned to college in California in 2010. Of the students immediately entering college following high school graduation, 25% of Latino students are entering the community colleges, 10% are enrolling in the CSU campuses, and a mere 3.8% are enrolling in one of the UC campuses.

Table 12: College Going Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2010

Ethnicity	High School		College-Going Rate		
	Public	UC	CSU	CCC	Total
Asian American	42,714	25.30%	13.00%	23.30%	61.60%
Black	25,987	4.10%	9.80%	22.10%	36.00%
Filipino	12,624	9.70%	16.00%	23.70%	49.40%
Latino	157,094	3.80%	10.00%	24.90%	38.70%
Native American	2,885	6.00%	4.10%	19.10%	29.20%
White	136,234	5.90%	10.00%	20.50%	36.40%
Statewide Total	377,538	7.20%	10.50%	22.90%	40.60%

Source: CPEC, 2015.

The system-wide data for English and Math Proficiency shows a high proportion of Mexican American or Latino students admitted to the CSU system not proficient in English or Math in 2013. Only 12.5% of Mexican American students were proficient in English and 16.4% were proficient in Math (Table 13). These data suggest challenges for the CSU system as they work to provide instruction to students that may struggle initially and require a greater level of academic support as they transition to college.

Table 13: Fall 2013 Final Regularly Admitted First-time Freshmen Proficiency CSU System-wide

Ethnicity	Number of Freshmen	Number Proficient in English and Math	% Proficient in English and Math	Number Proficient in English Only	% Proficient in English Only	Number Proficient in Mathematics Only	% Proficient in Mathematics Only	Number Proficient in Neither	% Proficient in Neither
American Indian	141	79	56.0%	23	16.3%	18	12.8%	21	14.9%
African American	2,597	916	35.3%	484	18.6%	285	11.0%	912	35.1%
Mexican American	19,821	8,834	44.6%	2,476	12.5%	3,260	16.4%	5,251	26.5%
Other Latino	5,141	2,503	48.7%	676	13.1%	677	13.2%	1,285	25.0%
Asian American	7,290	4,638	63.6%	302	4.1%	1,534	21.0%	816	11.2%
Pacific Islander	219	111	50.7%	28	12.8%	29	13.2%	51	23.3%
White Non-Latino	15,080	11,847	78.6%	1,411	9.4%	912	6.0%	910	6.0%
Filipino	2,761	1,746	63.2%	258	9.3%	397	14.4%	360	13.0%
Two or More Races	3,049	2,198	72.1%	364	11.9%	215	7.1%	272	8.9%
Unknown	1,896	1,234	65.1%	204	10.8%	185	9.8%	273	14.4%
Non-Resident	2,597	628	24.2%	194	7.5%	710	27.3%	1,065	41.0%
Total	60,592	34,734	57.3%	6,420	10.6%	8,222	13.6%	11,216	18.5%

Source: CSU Analytic System, CSU Division of Analytic Studies, 2013.

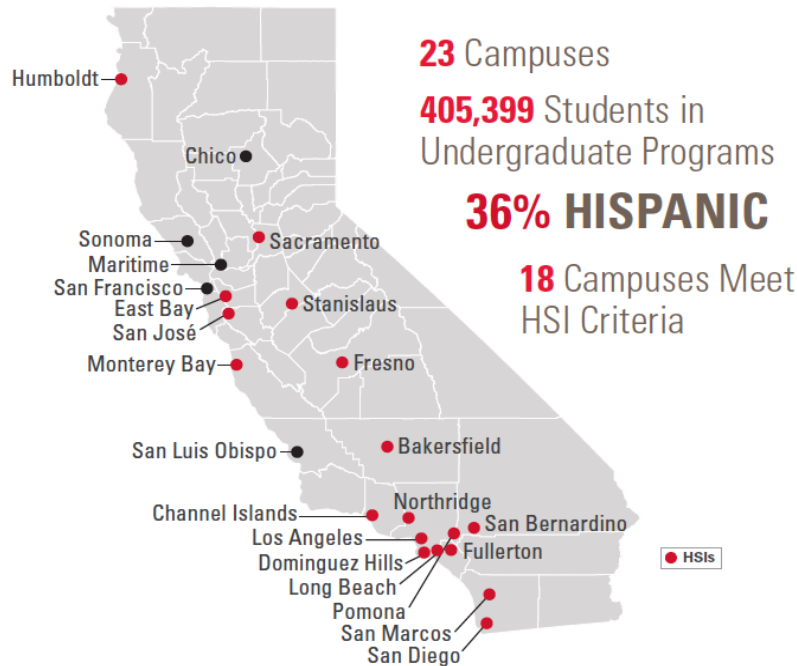
Since many Mexican American/Latino students choose to attend college close to home, community colleges are the primary choice for college transition. Twenty-five percent of all Latinos in California who graduate high school and immediately transition to college first enroll in the community college system. In fact, out of 116 community colleges in the state, 89 institutions are Hispanic Serving Institutions, with at least over 25% of their enrollment comprised of Latino students.

The CSU system is also an attractive option for Latino students, due to the degree options, regional proximity, and perceived cost effectiveness of attending a CSU vs. a UC school that has higher annual tuition rates. However, what students, particularly Latino students who are more likely to be first generation college students do not take into account is the fact that it often takes longer to earn the college degree by starting in the community colleges or a CSU campus, where time to degree rates average 6+ years for the bachelor's degree.

The CSU system however, in California is largely an HSI system, with over 36% of Latino students attending a CSU campus in 2014 (Figure 2). In addition, 18 out of 23 CSUs have greater than 25% Mexican American or Latino student enrollment (CSU, 2015) This critical

mass of Latino students is a strong draw for students of color generally, who consider the social factors, and campus climate in their college choice processes.

Figure 2
Distribution of CSUs Designated as HSIs in California



Source: CSU Department of Analytic Studies, 2015.

The CSU campuses serving the San Joaquin Central Valley reflect the large proportion of Mexican American students in the Central Valley. All of the CSU campuses serving the greater San Joaquin Central Valley can be classified as Hispanic Serving, and have had this status for some time. This challenges facing Latino students upon entry into college, with most of their Mexican American students first generation college students, also represent opportunities to create model Mexican American serving institutions that contribute to social and economic mobility for the next generation.

Table 14: CSU Enrollment by Select San Joaquin Central Valley Campuses, Fall 2014 (Percent)

Campus	Black	American Indian	Asian American	Filipino	Mexican American	Other Latino	Pacific Islander	White
Bakersfield	6.2	.6	3.6	3.6	41.9	7.8	.1	19.8
Fresno	3.5	.4	13.3	1.5	38.4	5.0	.2	24.4
Stanislaus	2.5	.4	9	1.6	41.5	4.6	.7	27.4

Source: CSU Department of Analytic Studies, 2014.

While the CSUs have higher levels of access for Latino students, distinct challenges remain to college completion within 6 years. Many of the CSUs struggle to graduate their Mexican American students, and a higher proportion of Mexican Americans and Latinos work more than 20 hours per week while attending college. Persistent poverty and competing family demands contribute to the longer time to degree rates for Latino students in California today, particularly those attending the CSUs or community colleges (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

V. California Community Colleges

California community colleges are home to the majority of Latino college goers. Developmental education needs, Time to degree, and low transfer rates are among some of the key challenges facing Latino community college students. The community college data in the San Joaquin Central Valley shows the completion/SPAR rates across community college districts, which represents the percentage of degree seeking students that completed a two-year degree or transferred to a four-year college within six years of enrolling in a community college (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2007). Table 15 shows the majority of districts with significantly lower completion and SPAR rates for Latinos compared to their White and Asian American peers in the same 2005 cohort. West Hills Community College District, which serves Madera, Kings, Fresno, San Benito and Monterey appears to have the smallest gap in completion rates. West Kern CCD also had comparable completion rates between Latino students and Asian Americans, but a sizable gap between the rates seen for White students compared to Latinos remains well over 15 percentage points.

These data convey the distinct challenge of completion for Mexican American and Latino students starting their college trajectory in the community college system. In addition, outdated models for measuring success, such as the 30-unit rate, do not have the same predictive validity for college completion it had over 25 years ago. Students are simply taking longer to either complete their two year degree or transfer, and the traditional “tipping points” that served as markers of progress and success do not provide an accurate view of the students we can expect to see transfer or graduate with a two-year degree (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). The expansive window for college completion (now at 9 years for Latinos nationally) presents a serious challenge for institutions, as they utilize outdated frameworks for explaining student progress and success.

Table 15: Completion/SPAR for 2005 Cohort in Community Colleges Serving San Joaquin Central Valley, by Race/Ethnicity 2011 (Percent)

	Kern CCD	Merced CCD	San Joaquin Delta CCD	Sequoias CCD	State Center CCD	West Hills CCD	West Kern CCD
Overall	42.00%	39.42%	48.21%	45.32%	42.39%	44.16%	34.29%
Black	40.11%	30.21%	47.34%	44.71%	36.54%	43.33%	22.22%
American Indian	39.68%	16.67%	31.03%	42.86%	47.54%	70.00%	60.00%
Asian American	73.95%	47.96%	51.07%	52.70%	57.86%	48.15%	25.00%
Filipino	51.59%	56.25%	52.67%	56.25%	48.44%	50.00%	33.33%
Latino	35.58%	33.87%	40.40%	38.61%	35.61%	42.89%	25.38%
Pacific Islander	30.77%	33.33%	39.29%	20.00%	50.00%	33.33%	12.50%
White	45.88%	44.54%	52.20%	51.12%	48.68%	44.16%	42.47%

Source: California Community College Data Mart, 2015.

VI. The Plight of Undocumented students

Lack of college information and outright discrimination in high school and college settings that AB540 students experience is a very real phenomenon despite recent policy shifts seen through President Obama’s DACA 2012 federal policy and California’s state driver’s license (AB 60) policy for residents enacted in 2015.

The fact remains that close to 2 million children in California have parents who are not U.S. Citizens, which translates to a host of limitations for the family, ranging from social, health, to economic hardship.

Table 16: *Children in immigrant families in which resident parents are not U.S. citizens, California, 2009-2013*

Location	Data Type	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
California	Number	2,031,000	1,999,000	1,958,000	1,939,000	1,861,000
	Percent	45%	45%	44%	44%	43%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) KIDS COUNT DataCenter. Available: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>

In a study of Latino undocumented undergraduate students, the majority of my Latino student sample, were from rural cities and school contexts. Even though California has a greater critical mass of AB540 students, and a highly organized student base, there are still numerous institutional barriers that exist within K-12 and higher education contexts. In my study of rural students (Contreras, 2009), many described the discrimination they encountered both at the high school level to college and university staff members notably “offended” by their status. Alejandro for example, a high achieving student from rural Washington described his interaction with a financial aid officer at the flagship institution he was attending at the time:

I went to see about my employment authorization card because at first I was given the card, which allowed me to work. So I went to financial aid after it was denied to ask them, they said it was a mistake. The person ended up telling me, ‘That was just pure luck. You are lucky that you have not been deported.’ I wish I were able to stop this discrimination for immigrants.

(Contreras, 2009, p. 62)

In addition to unfortunate individual interactions, that have the possibility of deterring students from high school or the halls of higher education, it was also a common experience to encounter university leaders and staff members misinterpret state policies, or deliver misinformation related to undocumented students. Thus, it is important to remember that state and local policies also require oversight, to ensure that public entities are adhering to these laws appropriately. This is the feedback loop that appears to be missing across all states that have a more proactive policy framework that acknowledges the rights of undocumented students. Civil rights abuses still occur and require diligence and oversight to minimize such abuses.

VII. Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant as a beginning to a conversation on select issues that require attention and leadership for individuals in education settings serving a high proportion of Latino students.

Pre-K

- **Enrollment and Access to Quality Pre-School is critical for Latinos.** Numerous studies have documented the benefits of preschool and critical need for access to high quality pre-K opportunities (Garcia & Gonzales, 2006; Karoly, 2005). Expanding access to high quality preschool (and bilingual bicultural preschool settings) would help to mitigate gaps in word knowledge and early math concepts seen in Kindergarten and first grade and would serve to reduce the high number of Latinos retained in Kindergarten.
- **Align Pre-K efforts and curriculum to K-3 grades.** High quality preschools in more affluent cities and regions align their curriculum to the expectations for Kindergartners in the public and private school systems. Greater investment in high quality preschool and alignment efforts would serve as a foundation for greater percentages of Latino children scoring at proficient by the 3rd grade.
- **Examine the grade retention rates among Latino Kindergartners.** This is a largely unspoken civil rights issue in the California public education system. Why are so many Latino kindergartners being retained? Are ELL needs conflated with Kindergarten readiness?
- **Expand Pre-school linkages and opportunities for Latino children in districts with large proportions of Latino students, beginning at the age of 3.** Many developed nations begin preschool far earlier than families in the United States (Contreras & Gandara, 2009). Beginning at the age of 3 would provide Latino preschoolers with academic enrichment that may bring them closer to acquiring competencies that higher SES children have when they begin kindergarten.

K-12

- **Reframe approaches to testing and accountability.** High stakes testing frameworks have not resulted in higher student achievement; nor has there been a significant reduction in gaps in achievement. Testing and accountability frameworks should be used to inform practice rather than
- **Remove High School Exit Exam as a requirement for graduation.** Exit exams do not lead to increases in academic achievement. In fact, in the 26 states that have exit exams, these states have not shown measurable student progress on other academic indicators or student outcomes (Contreras, 2011).
- **Increase support for ELL students (and LTELLS) and their teachers.** Greater support for ELL students in CA is critical to raise overall achievement patterns. ELL

students remain the most underserved in the state and continue to score low on state and local assessments. Support for replicating promising models that have witnessed success in serving ELL students in their districts.

- **Recruit, Hire and Retain strong teachers of color.** The literature is clear on the benefits of teacher diversity on academic achievement, student engagement and motivation. Working to recruit and keep quality teachers is critical to creating healthy school climates.
- **Partner with proven community efforts and programs.** Non-profit programs such as PIQE, Puente to empower parents, raise college readiness and expand the immediate transition to college.
- **Examine & increase access to a rigorous curriculum while providing the resources to succeed in these course offerings.** A-G completion rates remain low among Latinos. Identifying students who need academic support early is an important first step to creating the foundation for A-G readiness by the time students reach high school.

Postsecondary

- **Greater alignment between K-12 and higher education.** The P-20 system in California remains disjointed across the segments and requires for greater integration, communication and active partnerships to ensure more seamless pathways to higher education and college completion.
- **Rethink Financial Aid for part-time community college students** (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Financial aid models are outdated in that they cater to the full time student. The reality is that a greater proportion of Mexican American students are working well over 20 hours per week causing them to attend college on a part time basis.
- **Increase faculty diversity across the segments, CC, CSU and UCs.** Faculty of color is more likely to mentor the critical mass of Latino students attending postsecondary institutions and provide real research opportunities. Limited faculty diversity contributes to the cycle of social reproduction remains present in academia.
- **Evaluate the ELC function in UC admissions.** Many Latino students who qualify for UC admission through the ELC program are not admitted to highly selective campuses. Examine the variation that exists in this policy and has it led to greater Latino student access to UC campuses.
- **Challenge the emphasis on out of state admissions**—Chicano/Latino students are being shut out of the UC system. Those that make it to the point of UC admission are the highest achievers in the state; far too many are being forced to attend college elsewhere when they had a highly competitive profile.

- **Challenge HSIs across the CC, CSU and UC system to move beyond Latino student access to institutions in the respective systems.** Greater focus across the HSIs in California needs to be placed on Latino academic achievement, representation across majors (such as high impact STEM majors, business, etc.), persistence, reducing time-to-degree and increasing overall college completion rates.

Together, these recommendations represent a starting point for consideration, dialogue and debate among key stakeholders who are concerned about the persistent cycle of poverty and low social mobility among Mexican American and Latinos in California. While the data suggest serious challenges facing institutional, community and state policy leaders, the fate of the Mexican American/Latino community is not pre-determined. Rather, the time is now to rewrite this cyclical story of limited educational progress, and ensure opportunities are expanded for the next generation of Mexican American and Latino students in California.

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