

Illinois Latino College Landscape Study

*Bringing the dream of a higher education
within reach for Latino students*

SEPTEMBER 2023

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*Bringing the dream of a higher education
within reach for Latino students*



*Conducted by the Latino Policy Forum,
in partnership with the
Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative,
to identify the factors that influence
Latino college preparation, enrollment, retention, and completion;
determine the status of students on this pathway; and
inform advocacy efforts to address
inequities in educational attainment.*



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About This Project

The Illinois Latino College Landscape Study spanned more than a year and would not have been possible without the knowledge and expertise of many individuals at the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC) at the University of Illinois, Lopez Strategic Solutions, and the Latino Policy Forum.

IWERC prepared a series of literature reviews for the Latino Policy Forum. IWERC's team—led by Meg Bates, PhD, director—included Ramona Alcalá, PhD; Fructoso Basaldua; Judith Kom Nguiffo; Mariana Barragán Torres, PhD; and Stephanie Werner, PhD.

The following Latino Policy Forum staff members provided invaluable support at our Latino College Landscape Advisory Committee meetings and throughout the project: Anna Arzuaga, PhD; Daniela Campos; Licinio Garcia (former assistant to Sylvia Puente); Rosario Hernandez; Carmen Martinez; Erika Mendez; Wilma Mendoza; and Vanessa Peña (former policy analyst).

Gudelia López and Vanessa Peña conducted the focus groups and interviews.

We are also grateful to report reviewers Meg Bates, PhD; Wil Del Pilar, PhD; and Mariana Barragán Torres, PhD; for their expertise and input.

Project leads: Gudelia López, PhD, principal at Lopez Strategic Solutions, and Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro, PhD, vice president of education policy and research at the Latino Policy Forum

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Although the expertise of our Illinois Latino College Landscape Study Advisory Committee members was critical to the success of this study, their status as committee members does not constitute an endorsement of the report's content—either by the committee members or their respective organizations.

We are deeply grateful for the support of our philanthropic partners. However, being identified as a financial supporter does not constitute an endorsement of the report's content.

The report author and the Latino Policy Forum take full responsibility for the report's content and any errors it may contain.



A Letter from Our President and CEO

Dear Readers,

This report highlights the challenges and opportunities that Latino students encounter as they pursue their college and career ambitions. As I write this letter, only 20% of Illinois Latinos between the ages of 25 and 64 have earned bachelor's degrees—the lowest rate among all racial/ethnic groups in the state.

We must do more to bring the dream of a higher education within reach for these Illinois residents. By working together to address the factors that lead to educational inequities, we can break down the barriers to college access and completion—so that more Latinos can succeed in our knowledge-based economy and lead happier, healthier, and more fulfilling lives.

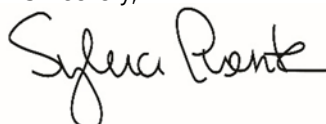
In the pages that follow, we have outlined six key issues that influence Latino college preparation, access, and degree completion, as well as postgraduate achievement. After a comprehensive review of existing research, an in-depth analysis of secondary data, and extensive consultation with the distinguished members of our Illinois Latino Landscape Study Advisory Committee, we have identified these issues as essential for supporting Latino students' college success.

Our rigorous analyses of existing research and the expertise of our advisory committee members—as well as the experiences of the Latino students and parents who participated in our focus groups—ensure that the findings in this report will provide a strong foundation for advocacy efforts to increase Latino college access and success. The changes needed to address the inequities in our educational system will require the cooperation and guidance of leaders in education and philanthropy, as well as leaders in the public and private sectors.

I am deeply grateful to those who provided invaluable advice and guidance on this project, including the members of our advisory committee, our partners at the Illinois Workforce Education Research Collaborative, our community partners and funders, the staff at the Latino Policy Forum, project leads Gudelia López, PhD, and Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro, PhD, and—most important—the Latino students and parents who generously shared their stories and perspectives.

As we build on the important work that others have done to increase equity in higher education, we look forward to collaborations with educators, educational advocates, researchers, legislators, and policymakers—as well as nonprofit, business, and community leaders—to ensure that more Illinois Latinos fulfill their promise and potential.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Puente

President and CEO, Latino Policy Forum



Executive Summary

A LARGE MAJORITY OF U.S. LATINOS—79% of those born in the U.S. and 87% of those born in Puerto Rico or another country—believe that America offers more opportunities for upward mobility than their ancestors’ countries or territories of origin (López and Moslimani 2022)—including access to a higher education, which many Latinos feel is important for getting ahead in life.

These beliefs are reflected in the following statements made by Latino Policy Forum focus group participants:

“College was ... always something that was in the back of my mind because it was something that my parents were always talking about... when we first came to the U.S., it was like, we’re here so that the kids can get an education and get a good career in the future.”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

“Because I always tell [my kids]: ‘If you have a good education, it gives you a better chance in the community to achieve whatever you feel, whatever your aspiration is.’”

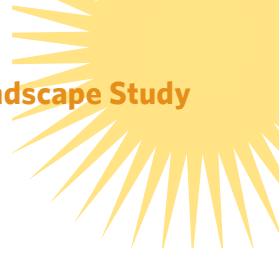
— FATHER OF A LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

“As Latinos in higher education, the stakes are higher for us. It feels like we are not only doing this for ourselves, but for our families, our home countries, and our people. Our need to succeed is great. Because, if we don’t, it feels like we will be failing not just ourselves, but our culture.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

As these quotes convey, many Latino parents have high aspirations for their children, and Latino students frequently harbor college aspirations of their own—not only for their personal benefit, but for the benefit of their families and the Latino community as a whole.

However, the systemic inequities that Latino students and their families encounter as they navigate the P-12 and higher education systems often thwart these college ambitions. According to the Lumina Foundation, only 25.8% of Latino adults aged 25 to 64 in Illinois earned associate degrees or higher in 2021, compared to 33.6% for Blacks, 54.3% for Whites, and 74.5% for Asians.



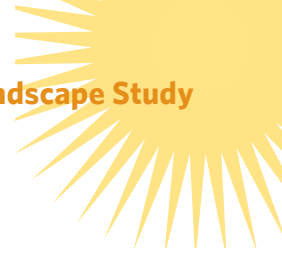
To gain a better understanding of the factors contributing to low educational attainment among Latinos—and to lay the foundation for future advocacy efforts to increase college access and completion—the Latino Policy Forum launched the Illinois Latino College Landscape Study in 2022.

Although data on Latino college students in the U.S. and Illinois—as well as a significant body of research on the factors that influence Latino college enrollment and completion—existed prior to this study, this information had not yet been consolidated into a single, comprehensive resource for Illinois educators, policymakers, and advocates.

To create this resource, the Forum partnered with the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC). Over the course of the study—which spanned more than a year—IWERC reviewed and synthesized existing literature on the factors that facilitated Latino college-going and completion, as well as existing data on the status of Latino college students in the U.S. and Illinois.

The Forum also convened an advisory committee; conducted focus groups with Latino college students, college graduates, and parents; and interviewed university staff and advocacy leaders to identify the barriers and opportunities that Latino students face as they pursue their dreams of a higher education.





This report presents the findings gleaned from this landscape study. The key findings summarized below are presented in greater detail in the body of the report.

Status of Latinos in P-12 and Higher Education

Latinos constitute an increasingly large percentage of the population in America. As population numbers rise, national data points to upward trajectories across multiple indicators of Latino educational attainment—including AP course enrollment, high school GPAs, college enrollment, and college graduation rates. However, Latinos still lag behind White and Asian students due to financial inequities such as their higher likelihood of attending high-poverty public schools or difficulties navigating the pathway to and through college.

Nationally, Latino college graduation rates (150% of normal time—i.e., within six years for bachelor’s degrees and three years for associate degrees) are 54% for Latinos enrolled in four-year institutions and 34% for Latinos enrolled in two-year institutions (NCES 2021). According to the most recent information available, completion rates for Latinos in Illinois are 25% for students attending community colleges, 51% for students attending public universities, 59% for students attending private nonprofit universities, and 32% for students attending for-profit colleges (Ostro 2020).

Key Findings from the Literature Reviews

Through its literature reviews, IWERC identified the key factors influencing college preparation, enrollment, retention, and completion, as well as the post-college landscape. The key issues and some key findings are summarized below.

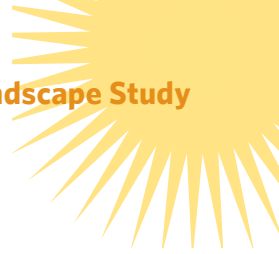
Academic Preparation for College

- Access to rigorous high school coursework (Advanced Placement, dual credit, International Baccalaureate) is related to college enrollment and persistence. Latino students have lower enrollment rates in Advanced Placement and dual-credit courses than their White and Asian peers.
- High school grade-point averages (GPAs) predict college enrollment and persistence. Students with a 3.0 GPA or higher are more likely to enroll in a four-year college and



FAST FACTS about Latino college students in the U.S.

- Forty-four percent are first-generation college students (Excelencia in Education 2019).
- Most are born in the U.S.
- Thirty-two percent work 40 or more hours per week while enrolled in college (Excelencia in Education 2019).



graduate (Roderick et al. 2006). GPAs have been rising nationally for all groups. However, Latino student GPAs stand at 2.95, below those of White and Asian students (NCES 2022d).

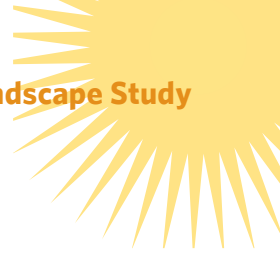
High School Counseling and Other Support

- Latino teachers support Latino student success and help Latinos develop a college-going identity. Illinois has a much smaller percentage of Latino teachers than students. However, the percentage of Latino teachers in Illinois school districts rises as the percentage of Latino students increases.
- Counselors play an important role in supporting Latino students as they prepare for college. Latino students desire more postsecondary counseling, particularly one-on-one counseling. However, the ratio of students to counselors in Illinois and Chicago is much higher than the American School Counselor Association’s recommended ratio of 250 students for every counselor (ASCA n.d.), which makes it difficult for schools to provide more individualized attention and support for Latino students.



Students with a 3.0 GPA or higher are more likely to enroll in a four-year college and graduate.





- Nonprofit college-access organizations play an important role in augmenting the counseling support available to students at their high schools.

Navigating the Pathway to and Through College

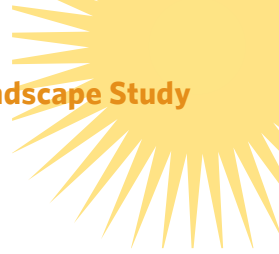
- Key transition points and choices influence college attendance and persistence, such as knowing how to complete the college enrollment process the summer after graduating from high school.
- Latino students and families often lack the navigational capital to understand how college works, the role that college advisors play in fostering student success, the impact of late course registration, or the steps involved in transferring from a two-year to a four-year college or university. These navigational challenges can have a profound effect on college persistence and completion.

Understanding College Financing

- Latino college enrollment is influenced by family socioeconomic status (which is lower than that of White families on average), as well as Latino families' reluctance to take on debt.
- Navigating the financial-aid application process—including completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms and enduring an audit-like process known as verification before receiving a financial-aid award—proves challenging for Latino students and parents, who may lack access to financial advising in high school and college settings. These challenges can preclude enrollment and persistence.
- Latino students are more likely to be responsible for paying some or all of their college tuition than their White and Asian peers. Consequently, they work more during college, with 32% working 40-plus hours a week (Excelencia in Education 2019) and are more likely to attend college part-time. Both factors are related to attrition.

The Importance of Family During the College Journey

- Latino students value being closer to home to draw on family and community supports. For this reason, decisions about college application and enrollment are influenced by location.
- The entire family is often involved in the college decision-making process for Latino students. The Latino cultural value of “familismo” prioritizes family needs over individual needs, and students weigh their responsibilities to family members carefully when making decisions related to college enrollment and persistence. Families are sources of social and emotional support during college as well.



- However, Latino students report that their parents often have a limited understanding of the college workload and expectations, and note that college outreach to Latino parents is often inadequate, particularly with regard to bilingual materials.

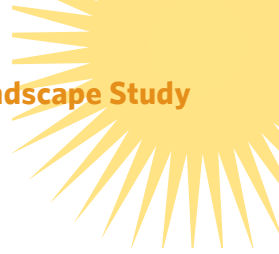
The Post-College Landscape

- Latino students who attained bachelor's degrees in Spring 2020 were less likely to be employed, to be employed full-time, or to pursue postgraduate education than their White, Asian, American Indian, and multiracial peers.
- Latino college graduates earn more than non-college graduates, but racial/ethnic disparities in employment and pay persist across college graduates. Latino college graduates earn less than their White counterparts, even when controlling for college major and occupation.

These six key issues were also raised by the Latino college students, college graduates, and parents who participated in our focus groups. The students and graduates also discussed

The entire family is often involved in the college decision-making process for Latino students.





the difficulty of navigating college if they or their parents were undocumented, as well as the emotional toll of being a member of a minoritized group on college campuses, experiencing racism, and/or feeling like they didn't belong.



Conclusion

Latinos continue to see the United States as a “land of opportunity,” with more avenues for upward mobility—including access to higher education—than their ancestors enjoyed in their countries of origin.

Yet the road to, through, and beyond college in the U.S. and Illinois is still a difficult one for many Latinos (especially first-generation college students and their families) to navigate.

This report points to the key factors that should be addressed to deliver on the promise of a higher education for Latino students in Illinois.

The Forum will partner with community and educational leaders, agencies, decision-makers, and higher education advocacy groups, while developing its own advocacy agenda and participating in efforts to increase college-degree attainment for more Latino students and their families in the years to come. ✨



Introduction

ACROSS ILLINOIS, 50% of the Latino high school students in the Class of 2020 enrolled in college (ISBE 2021). This statistic reflects a widespread desire among young Latinos to pursue a college education. But many of these newly minted college students may not make it to graduation day.

According to Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) college completion statistics released in 2020, only 25% of the Latino students enrolled at Illinois community colleges, 51% enrolled at Illinois public universities, and 59% enrolled at private nonprofit universities in Illinois completed their college journeys and earned degrees (Ostro 2020).

Given the benefits of attaining a college degree—including higher employment rates and earnings, healthier lifestyles, home ownership, and an increased likelihood of being involved in



their children’s educational lives (Ma and Pender 2023; Turk 2019)—it is important to ensure that Latino students who wish to attain a college degree can do so.

The low Latino college graduation rates in Illinois indicate a critical need to address the barriers to degree completion. Latino high school students must receive the preparation they need to succeed in a college setting, college must be affordable, and institutions of higher education must be prepared to serve and graduate their Latino students.

To ensure that more Latinos have opportunities to attain college degrees and achieve their personal and professional goals, the Latino Policy Forum will begin to advocate for greater equity in Latino college access and completion.

To inform the development of this advocacy agenda, the Forum initiated the Illinois Latino College Landscape Study in partnership with the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC). Over the course of the study, which was launched in 2022 and conducted over a 16-month period, IWERC reviewed and synthesized a significant body of existing research on the factors that facilitate Latino college-going and completion and gathered data on the status of Latinos in higher education in the U.S. and Illinois.

The Forum also sought out the perspectives of a large array of stakeholders and convened an advisory committee consisting of 42 members, including university and community college presidents and chancellors, as well as P-12 district superintendents and CEOs at institutions and districts serving the largest number of Latino students in Illinois. Other advisory committee members included leaders of college-access organizations, community service organizations, higher education advocacy organizations, research organizations, foundations, state agencies, and businesses, as well as a state legislator and two college students. The advisory committee provided feedback on the study and assisted in identifying key barriers and supports for Latino college access and completion. Forty-seven Latino students and parents shared their experiences in focus groups, while university staff and advocacy leaders provided critical information in interviews.

The following pages of this report detail the results of these literature reviews and analyses and provide state and national data on Latino college preparation, enrollment, retention, completion, and post-college outcomes, as well as Illinois context, including demographics, the P-12 education system, and higher education.

The Forum recognizes that Black students face many of the same challenges with regard to college access, retention, and completion. To begin to address these challenges, Chicago State University convened an Equity Working Group for Black Student Access and Success in Illinois Higher Education and published an action plan. The Forum stands ready to partner with Chicago State University and others to address systemic inequities in higher education. ✨

Latinos in the United States

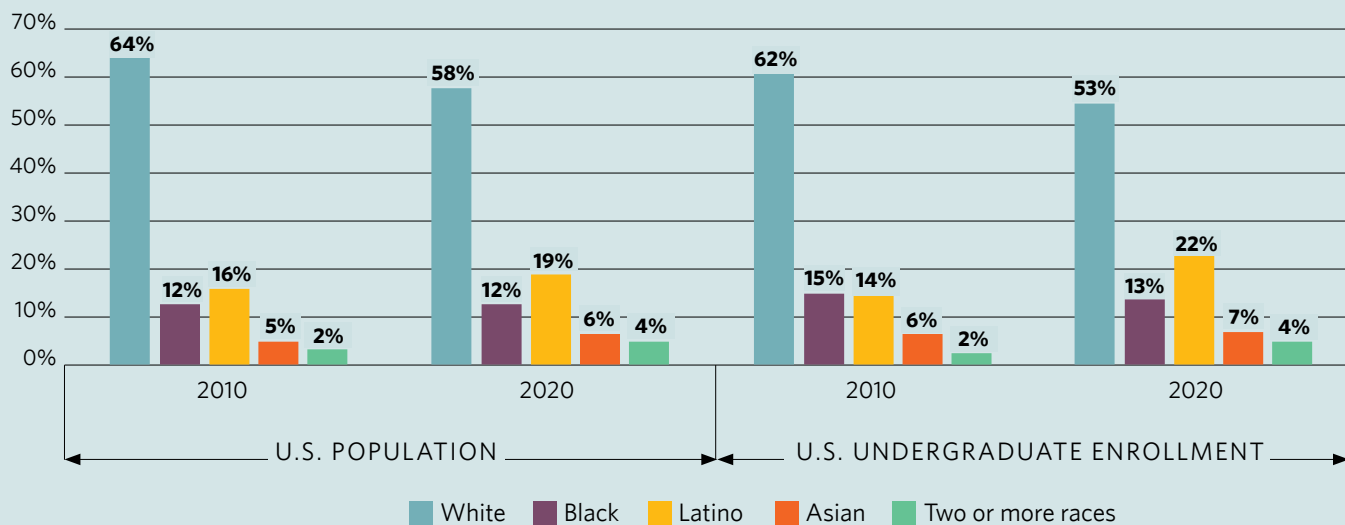
Latinos play a critical role in our national economy and society. The total economic output of Latinos in the U.S. was \$2.8 trillion in 2020, up from \$1.7 trillion in 2010 (Fienup 2023). Part of this growth is due to increases in the Latino population.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Latino population increased by 19% between 2010 and 2020—from 50.5 million to 62.1 million (see Figure 1) (Jones et al. 2021). Latinos are projected to make up 28% of the U.S. population by 2060, and the proportion of Latinos born in the U.S. is growing. In 2020, 68% of all Latinos living in the U.S. were born in this country.

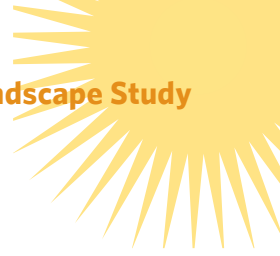
Many U.S. Latinos come from families with lower-than-average median incomes and are likely to attend high-poverty schools (schools where more than 75 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches). The median Latino household income in 2021 was \$57,981, compared to \$77,999 for White households and \$70,784 for all races/ethnicities (Peter G. Peterson Foundation 2022). In Fall 2019, 43% of Latinos attended high-poverty public schools, compared to 8% of White, 14% of Asian, and 45% of Black students (NCES 2019).

FIGURE 1

A growing demographic: Latinos make up an increasingly large percentage of the U.S. population and U.S. undergraduate enrollment.



SOURCE: <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>



Language and English Learners

Many Latinos continued to speak Spanish while becoming proficient in English. Sixty-eight percent of Latinos ages five and older spoke Spanish at home and 72% spoke English proficiently (Krogstad et al. 2022). Among foreign-born Latinos, 37% spoke English proficiently and 93% spoke Spanish at home (Krogstad et al. 2022).

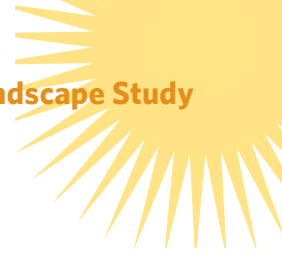
Although the percentage of Latinos born in the U.S. continues to rise, bilingual education services are still needed in the P-12 education system. In 2020, about five million (10.3%) of all students in U.S. P-12 school districts were designated as English learners, with larger proportions of English learners found in lower elementary grade levels than in middle schools and high schools (NCES 2023). However, 6.4% of 11th graders and 5.6% of 12th graders in 2020 were English learners (NCES 2023). In 2020, Latinos made up 77.1% of English learners, and 76% of English learners reported Spanish as their home language (NCES 2023). Any students identified as English learners (especially high school students with this designation) may require additional support if they enroll in college.

While English learners are an important group—and many Latinos in the P-12 education system are designated as English learners—colleges do not track this data (Shapiro 2022). Some researchers attribute an increase in the English learner population in higher education to the presence of international students, an increase in English learners in the P-12 system, and the growth of the Latino and Asian population (Bergey et al. 2018).

There is also a growing recognition that educational outcomes for current English learners present an incomplete—and unintentionally biased—picture. To provide more complete and balanced assessments, researchers are beginning to analyze educational outcomes for various groups of English learners, including former English learners (students who have attained English proficiency and no longer need bilingual education programming) (de la Torre et al. 2019).

Because data for these other groups did not exist at the time of the study, we have not included English learner higher education outcomes in this report. The Latino Policy Forum is currently partnering with the UChicago Consortium on School Research to disseminate an upcoming report that will provide a more complete picture of the high school performance and college outcomes of various groups of English Language Learners in Chicago Public Schools.

Although the percentage of Latinos born in the U.S. continues to rise, bilingual education services are still needed in the P-12 education system.



High School Preparation

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), students took more courses in high school than in previous years, completed a more challenging curriculum (defined as four credits in English; three credits in social studies; four credits in math, including geometry, Algebra I or II, and pre-calculus or higher; three credits in science, including biology, chemistry, and physics; and three foreign-language credits), and earned higher grade-point averages (GPAs) (Nord et al. 2011).

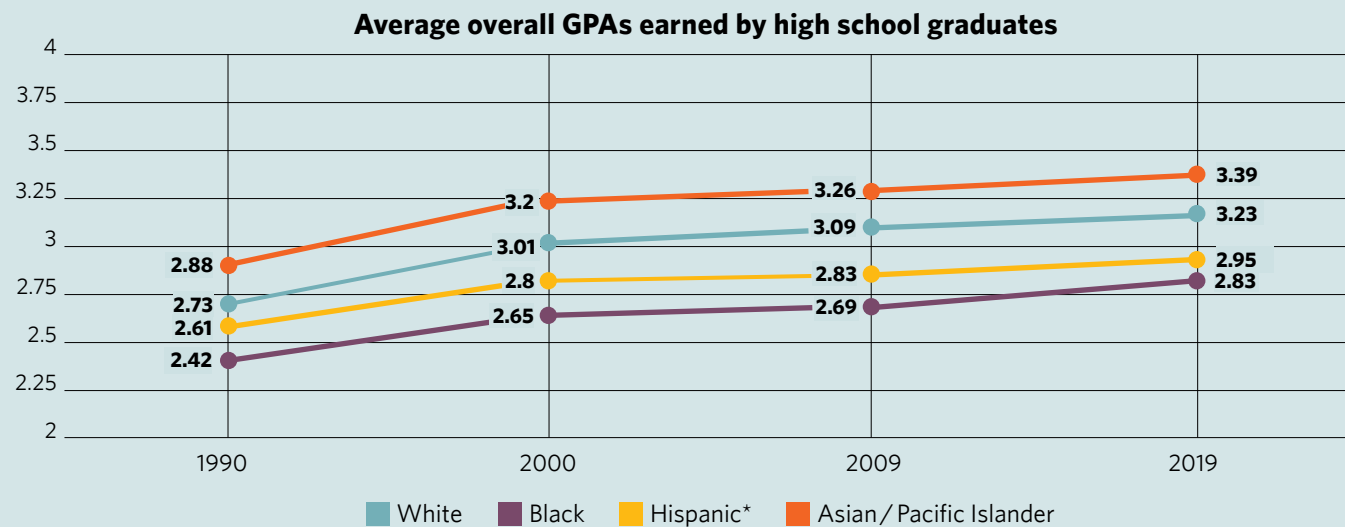
Inequities by race/ethnicity are evident across these indicators. In 2009, 8% of Latino students completed a rigorous curriculum, compared to 6% of Black students, 14% of White students, 29% of Asian students, and 13% of all students (Nord et al. 2011). More recent data shows that high school grade-point averages increased over time for all groups (see Figure 2), but was still lower for Latino students (2.95) and Black students (2.83) (NCES 2022d).

Differences were also evident in AP enrollments and test scores for students who started high school in 2009. Thirty-two percent of Latinos enrolled in AP courses, compared to 67% of Asian students, 39.4% of White students, and 22.5% of Black students (Taylor et al. 2020).

Although more recent AP data was not disaggregated by race and ethnicity, 402,498

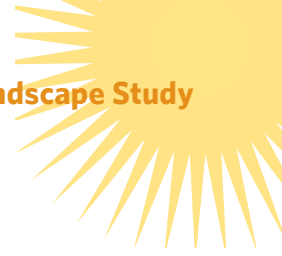
FIGURE 2

Latino GPAs rising but still below 3.0: The average grade-point average (GPA) for Latino high school graduates rose by 13% between 1990 and 2019, but is still below 3.0, a predictor of college success.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress High School Transcript Study, various years, 1990–2019

*Although the Latino Policy Forum uses the term “Latino,” some of the national and state agencies use the term “Hispanic.”



Equitable academic resources and opportunities in earlier grades are critical to eliminating racial/ethnic performance gaps in advanced classes.

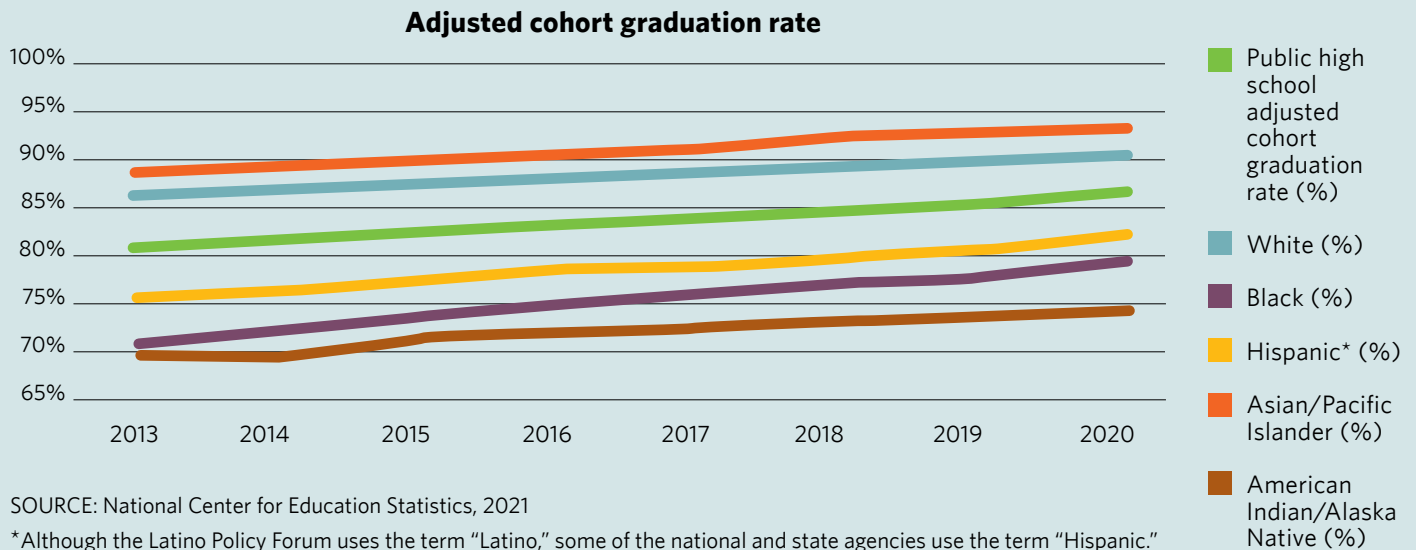
students of color took at least one AP exam in 2022, compared to 143,176 in 2012 (College Board 2022). AP test-score differences between Black and White students and Latino and White students almost disappeared when controlling for prior achievements. Researchers noted that “equitable academic resources and opportunities in earlier grades are critical to eliminating racial/ethnic performance gaps in advanced classes” (Ewing and Wyatt 2023, 8). Thus, improvements in learning opportunities for Latino students in elementary and middle school can be an effective strategy for improving AP test scores.

High School Graduation Rates

Although a greater percentage of Latinos have graduated from high school, Latino high school graduation rates in SY 2019–20 remained at approximately 83%, compared to 90% for White students and 87% overall (NCES 2023b). 🌟

FIGURE 3

Completing high school at record rates, but still below average: Although rising, the adjusted high-school cohort graduation rates of Latino/Hispanic students remained lower than those of White and Asian students from 2013 to 2020.



College Access and Completion Outcomes for Latinos in the United States

According to UnidosUS, “the story of Latinos in the U.S. educational system has been one of steady gains in academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment” in recent years—progress that has been made “as a result of tireless advocacy by the Latino community and the determination of students and families to pursue their educational dreams” (UnidosUS 2022).

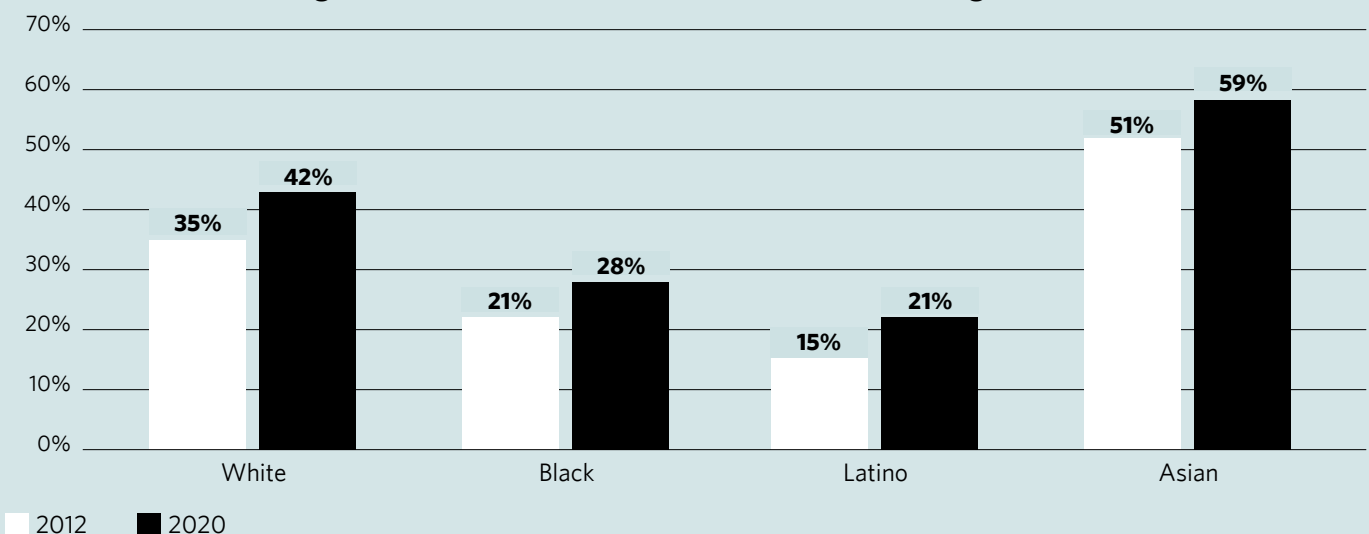
Across the nation, Latinos are graduating from high school at unprecedented rates. From 2013 to 2020, graduation rates for Latino high school students rose from 75% to 83%—an all-time high (NCES 2023b) (see Figure 3 on page 18).

Despite this promising statistic, inequities persist—and Latino high school graduates often encounter barriers as they navigate the pathway from secondary to postsecondary education. **For far too many Latino college students, the dream of earning a college degree remains out of reach.** In 2022, the percentage of Latinos aged 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 21%—the lowest among all racial/ethnic groups (U.S. Census 2023) (see Figure 4).

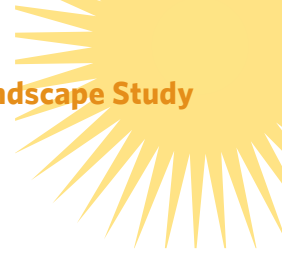
FIGURE 4

Bachelor’s degree completion rates rise, but inequities remain: Although the percentage of Latino students who earned bachelor’s degrees rose from 15% to 21% nationally between 2012 and 2022, Latino four-year degree completion rates are still the lowest of any racial/ethnic group.

Percentage of adults 25 and older who earned bachelor’s degrees: 2012–2022



SOURCE: U.S. Census, 2023



It is projected that, by 2029, the typical college student will be low-income, minority, and likely Latino.

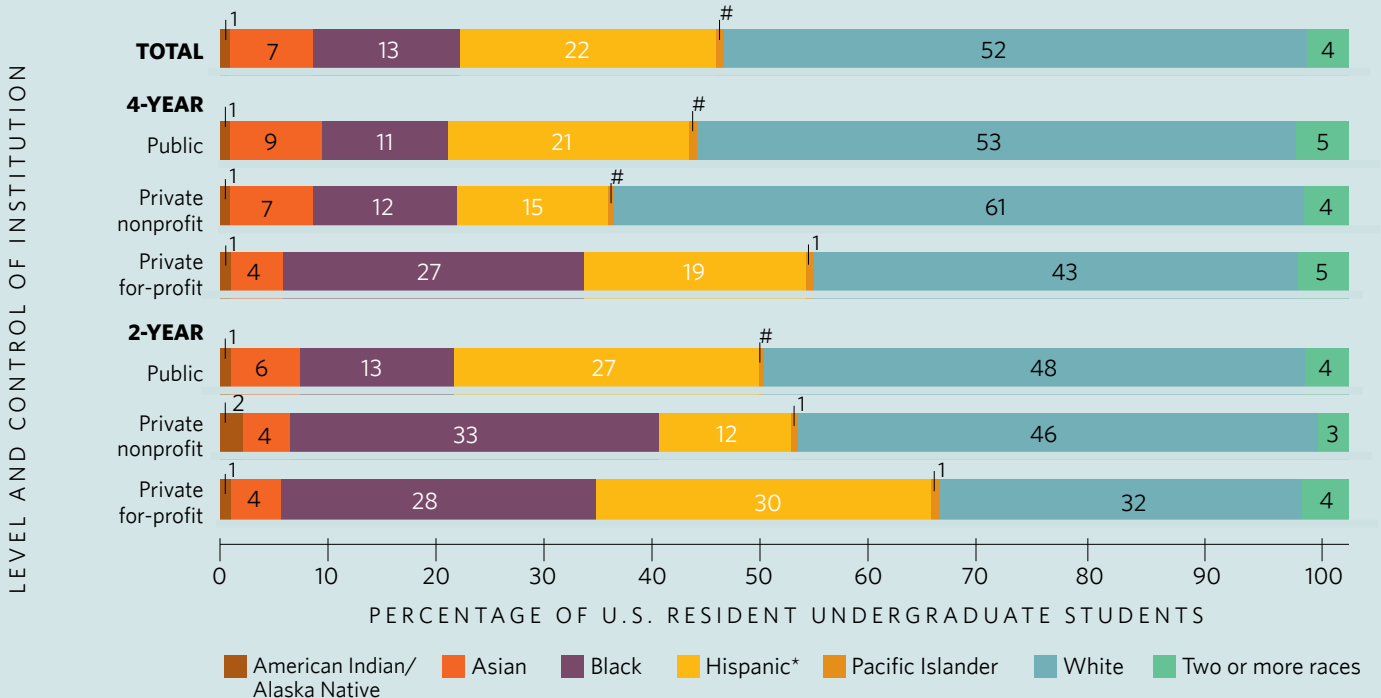
Even as the number of Latinos in the U.S. has grown and high school graduation rates have increased, the percentage of Latino high school completers who immediately enroll in college has remained relatively flat at approximately 57% (NCES 2023c). The national data also indicates that the pandemic affected college-going decisions, with 17% of Latinos who were college bound in Fall 2021 reporting that they had canceled their college-going plans (NCES 2022c).

Nevertheless, Latinos constituted 22% of college undergraduates in the U.S. (see Figure 5). In 2020, Latinos made up 21% of enrollment at four-year public institutions and 27% of enrollment at two-year public

FIGURE 5

A popular Latino college pathway: Latinos made up a large percentage of students attending two-year institutions.

Percentage distribution of U.S. resident undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student race/ethnicity: Fall 2021

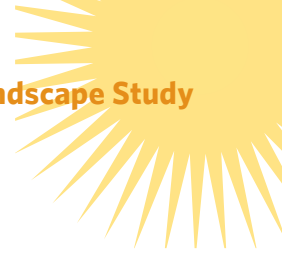


Rounds to zero.

*Although the Latino Policy Forum uses the term “Latino,” some of the national and state agencies use the term “Hispanic.”

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. This figure excludes 122 institutions with missing data on Carnegie classifications, with 38,778 students enrolled. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 306.50.



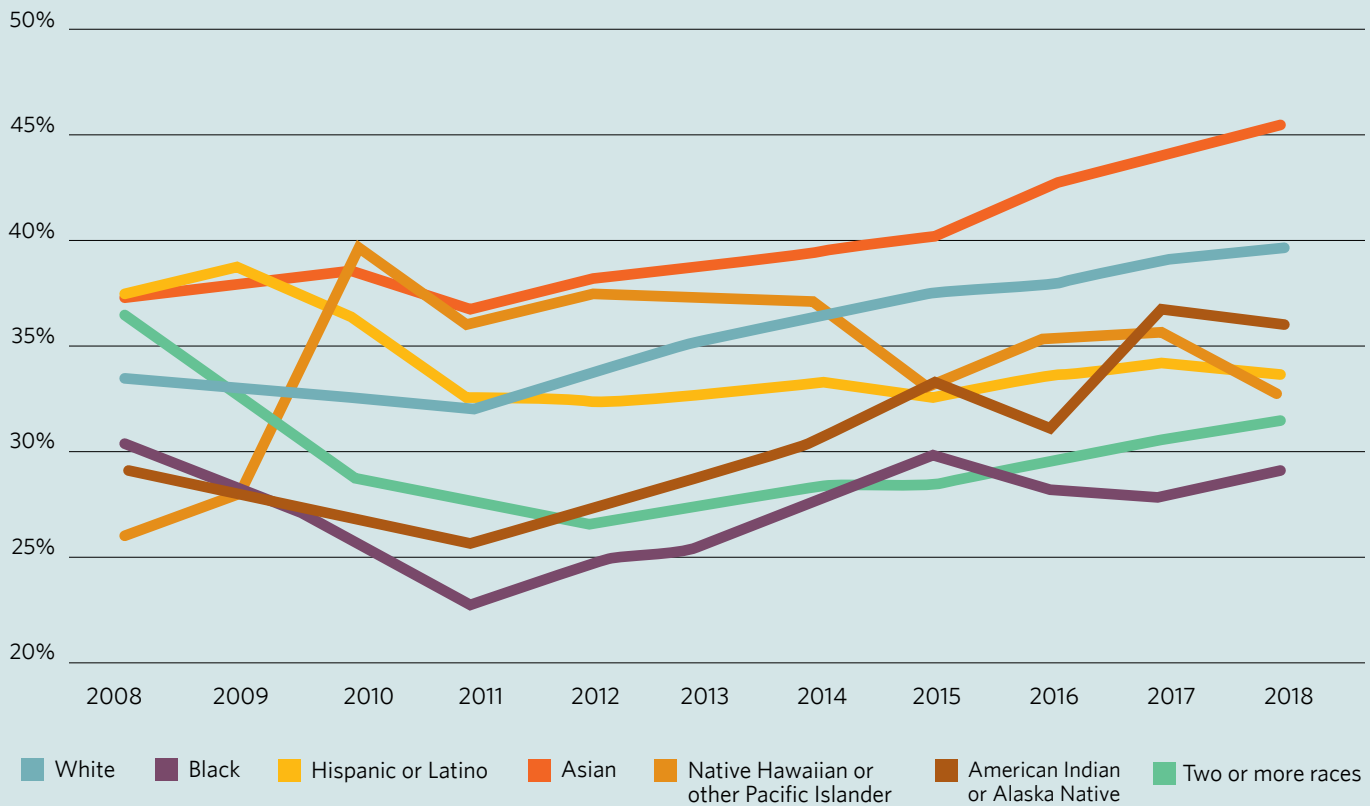
institutions (NCES 2023c). It is projected that, by 2029, the typical college student will be low-income, minority, and likely Latino (Graw 2018).

The high percentage of Latino students enrolled at two-year institutions matters because of the low graduation rates at these institutions and the low student transfer rate from two- to four-year colleges. Only 33.8% of Latinos completed associate degrees within three years in 2018 (NCES 2021) (see Figure 6). Nationally, only 15% of all students who started out at a two-year college transferred to a four-year institution and completed a bachelor’s degree in six years in 2022 (NSC 2022). This rate increased to 22.6% for two-year college students attending classes full-time (NSC 2022).

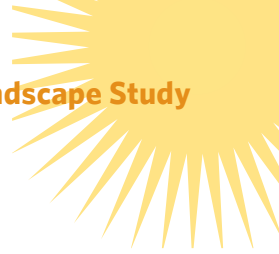
FIGURE 6

Lower graduation rates at two-year institutions: Only about a third of Latino students at two-year institutions complete associate degrees within three years.

Graduation rates (150% normal time) for two-year institutions



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Graduation Rates component final data (2002-2020), and provisional data (2021).



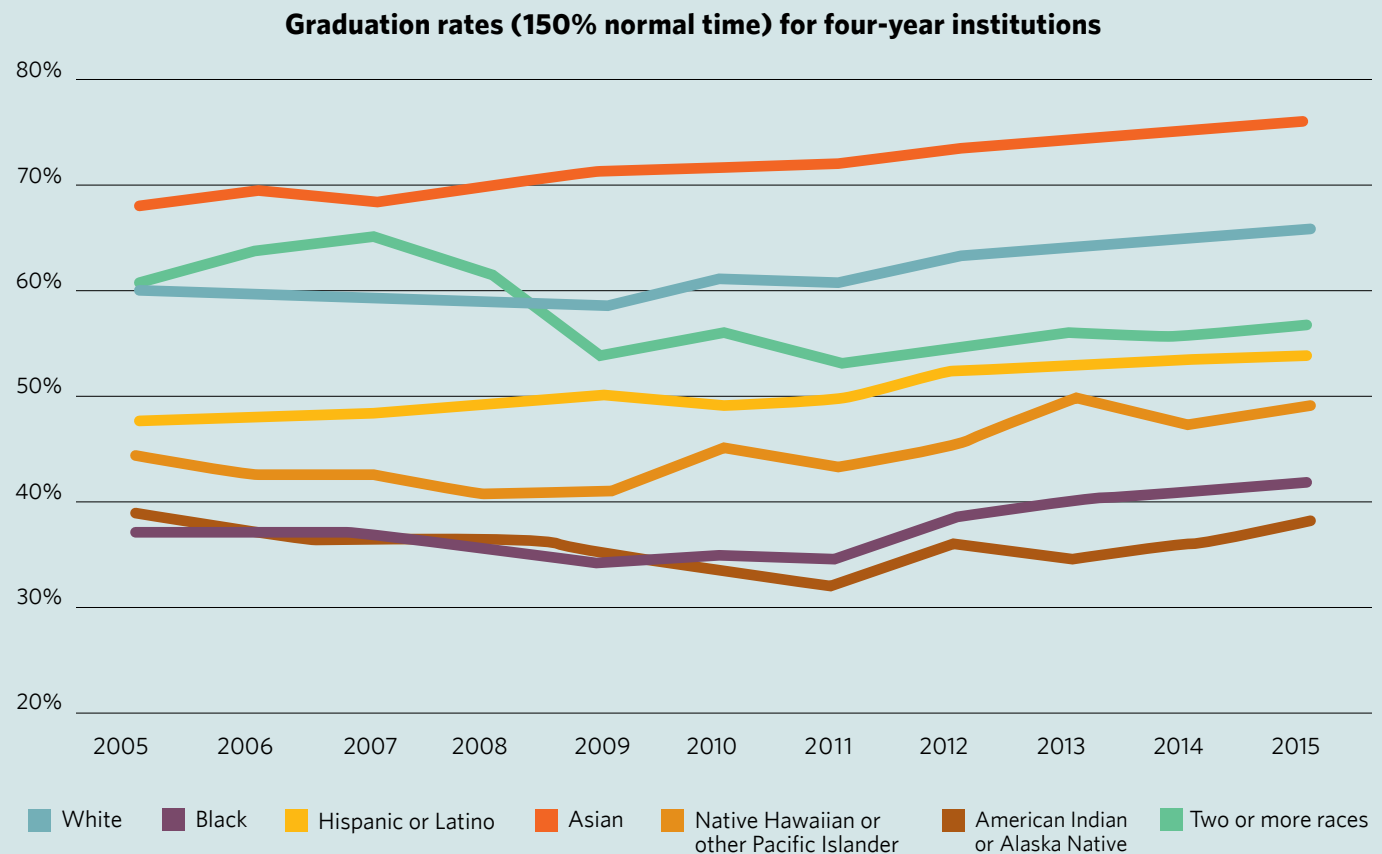
A greater percentage of Latinos enrolled at four-year institutions complete bachelor’s degrees within six years (NCES 2021) (see Figure 7). Although college graduation rates are trending upward for all demographics, many students do not earn college degrees.

Some students “stop out” because they are placed in remedial education when they get to college—a placement decision that is often predicated on a single test score (Zaback et al. 2016). Students who do not meet the standards set by the institution must successfully complete non-credit-bearing courses—typically in math, reading, and writing—before taking college-level English or math gateway courses.

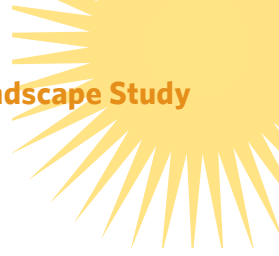
Latino students are placed in remedial courses at high rates at both two- and four-year colleges (Zaback et al. 2016). In 2016, 39% of Latino first-time students at four-year colleges

FIGURE 7

Higher graduation rates at four-year institutions: Fifty-three percent of Latinos attending four-year institutions complete a bachelor’s degree in six years.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Graduation Rates component final data (2002–2020) and provisional data (2021)



In 2019, across all racial/ethnic groups, one in every 50 college students nationwide was undocumented.

were placed in remedial, non-credit-bearing courses, compared to 25% of Asian students and 24% of White students. Remedial course enrollment rates at two-year colleges were much higher for students from all racial/ethnic groups (Zaback et al. 2016).

Remedial courses can be demoralizing for students, who must often use limited financial-aid dollars to cover the cost of these non-credit courses. Some withdraw from college altogether (Zaback et al. 2016). When this happens, student retention rates drop and the number of individuals with some college, but no degree, rises.

As of July 2021, the Some College, No Credential (SCNC) population totaled 40.4 million individuals who entered college in 2013 or later. Latinos comprised 23.6% of these SCNC students (National Student Clearinghouse 2023).

Nevertheless, Latino students understand the value of a college degree and would prefer to return to college. According to the 2023 Gallup-Lumina State of Higher Education study, 53% of the Latino adults who were not enrolled in college (up from 44% in 2021) reported that they thought about enrolling in a postsecondary program (Gallup-Lumina 2023). On the other hand, 52% of current Latino college students reported that they considered “stopping” out in the past six months—up from 44% in 2021 (Gallup-Lumina 2023).

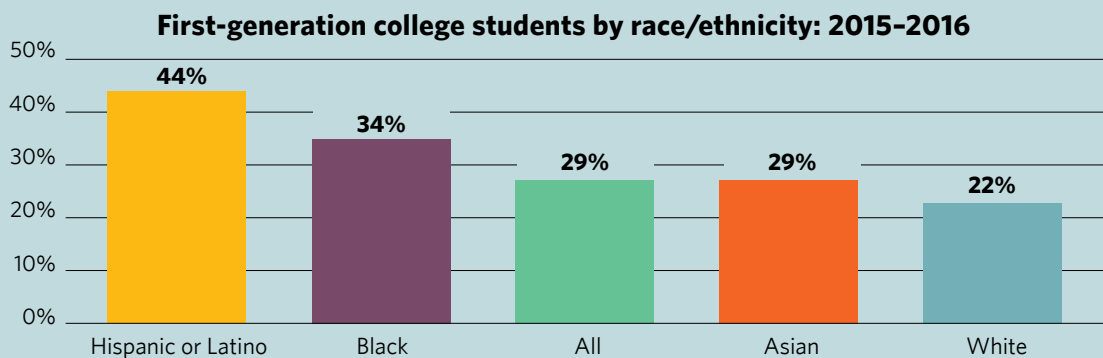
It is also important to consider the large group of college students who are undocumented, as a portion of these students are Latino. Undocumented college students face significant challenges during their college journeys. Undocumented students are not eligible for federal Pell Grants and, in some states, cannot apply for in-state tuition and financial aid. Undocumented students who do not have Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) status also pursue their studies while coping with the constant threat of deportation, as well as the knowledge that, even with a degree, their access to employment will be limited by their immigration status (Flores et al. 2021). In 2019, across all racial/ethnic groups, one in every 50 college students nationwide was undocumented, for a total of 427,000 students (Penichet-Paul 2023). ✨

Characteristics of Latino college students in the U.S.

FORTY-FOUR PERCENT of Latino college students in the U.S. were the first in their families to go to college—the highest percentage of any racial/ethnic group (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

First to college: Forty-four percent of Latino college students were the first in their families to pursue a higher education in SY 2015–16.

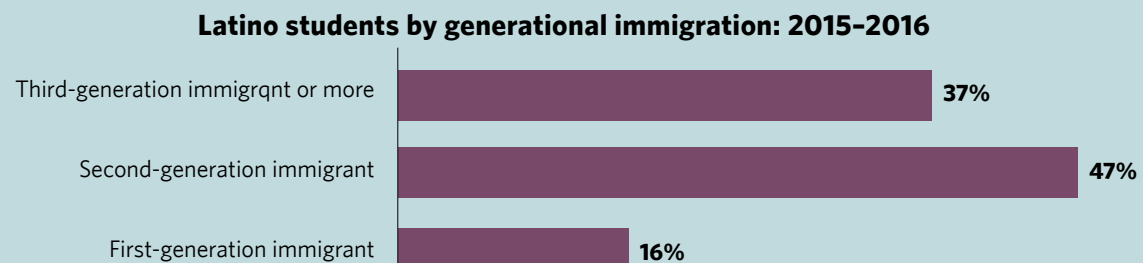


SOURCE: Excelencia in Education, 2019

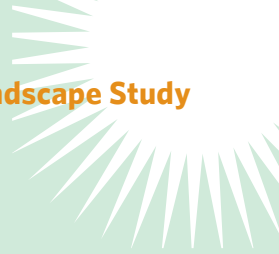
Only 16% of Latino college students in SY 2015–16 were first-generation immigrants (individuals born outside of the U.S.). Forty-seven percent were second-generation (individuals who were born in the U.S., with one or both parents born in another country). Thus, most Latino college students were born in the U.S. (Excelencia in Education 2019) (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9

Born in the USA: The greatest percentage of Latino college students in SY 2015–16 were second-generation.



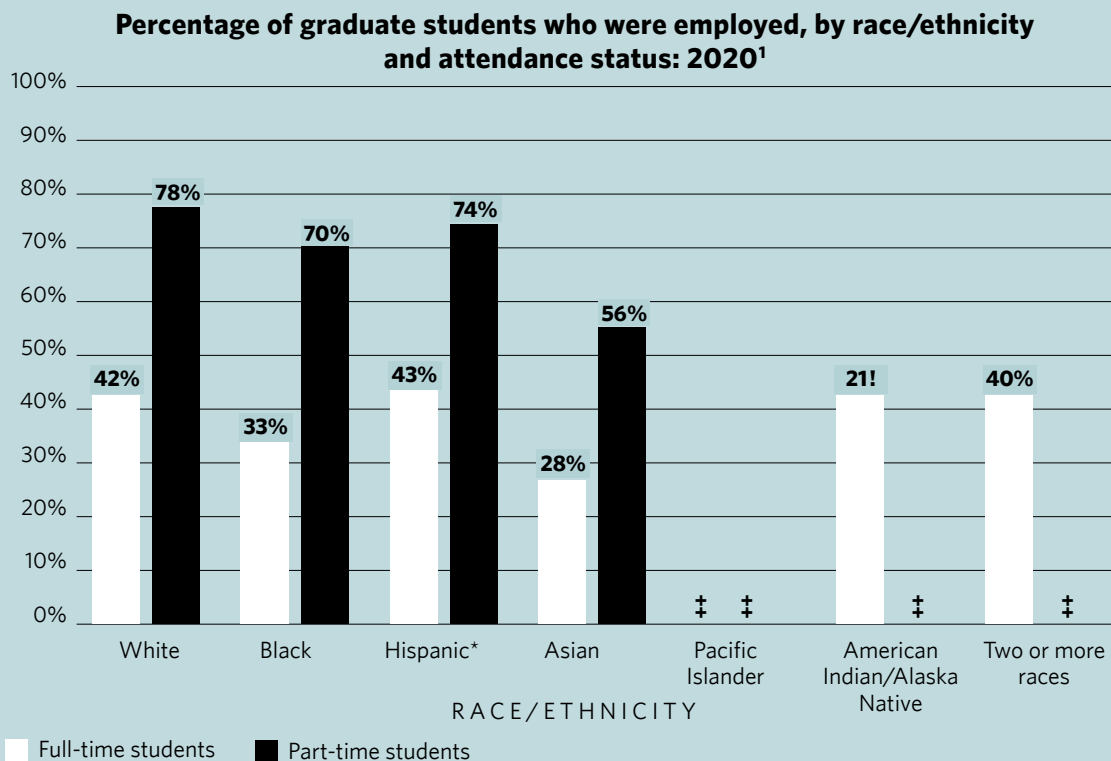
SOURCE: Excelencia in Education, 2019



Latino students were more likely to be enrolled part-time or to be “co-enrolled” in multiple postsecondary institutions (Taggart 2022). Latino students were also more likely to be employed (32% worked more than 40 hours a week) (Excelencia in Education 2019) than Black and Asian students and as likely to work as White students (see Figure 10) (NCES 2022a).

FIGURE 10

Juggling work and school: In 2020, a large percentage of full-time undergraduate students were employed, especially among Latino and White students.



¹ Interpret data with caution. the coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics 2022, College Student Employment, *Condition of Education*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/ssa>.

*Although the Latino Policy Forum uses the term “Latino,” some of the national and state agencies use the term “Hispanic.”

Latino males tend to major in business, architecture and engineering, social science, and humanities and liberal arts. Latinas, on the other hand, tend to major in business, education, humanities and liberal arts, and psychology and social work (Carnevale and Fasules 2017).

TABLE 1

College majors by gender and race/ethnicity: The most common Latino major is business.

Distribution of major groups by gender and race and ethnicity						
MAJOR GROUP	WHITE MEN	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN	HISPANIC/LATINO MEN	WHITE WOMEN	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN	HISPANIC/LATINA WOMEN
Business	25%	27%	25%	17%	24%	23%
Architecture and engineering	14%	10%	17%	2%	2%	4%
Social sciences	9%	9%	8%	7%	8%	7%
Humanities and liberal arts	10%	8%	8%	11%	7%	10%
Computers, statistics, and mathematics	7%	8%	7%	3%	4%	3%
Education	6%	7%	6%	19%	13%	15%
Biology and life sciences	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%
Arts	4%	3%	4%	5%	2%	4%
Psychology and social work	4%	5%	4%	8%	11%	10%
Law and public policy	3%	5%	4%	2%	4%	3%
Communications and journalism	4%	4%	3%	5%	5%	4%
Physical sciences	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Health	2%	3%	3%	12%	12%	9%
Industrial arts, consumer services, and recreation	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Agriculture and natural resources	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, *Latino Education and Economic Progress: Running Faster, But Still Behind*, 2017.

Latinos in Illinois

IN 2020, LATINOS REPRESENTED THE SECOND LARGEST RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP IN ILLINOIS, constituting 18% of the state's 13 million residents. As Figure 11 on page 28 illustrates, the Latino population in Illinois grew by 15% in the decade between 2010 and 2020—from just over 2.0 million to 2.3 million (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). According to projections released by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Latinos will make up 30.8% of the Illinois population by 2050 (CMAP 2014).

This population growth was reflected in the growing percentage of Latinos enrolled in the Illinois P-12 system and in higher education. Latino P-12 enrollments grew by 29% between 2010 and 2020. But the most significant increase was at the college level, with enrollments increasing by 110% from 10% in 2010 to 21% in 2020. **During this same time frame, enrollment numbers for White and Black students decreased in both the P-12 system and in higher education** (IBHE n.d.).

Meanwhile, the school-age population is changing in other important ways. Declining birth rates and school enrollments predict significantly smaller high school classes in the years to come (Illinois Department of Public Health 2023)—and fewer prospective college applicants. These trends will transform the college landscape as institutions of higher education adapt to declining enrollments and shifting student demographics.

Latino college enrollments increased by 110% between 2010 and 2020.



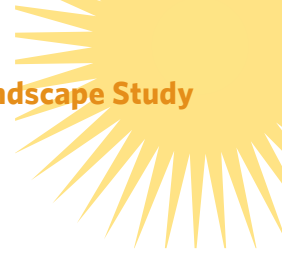
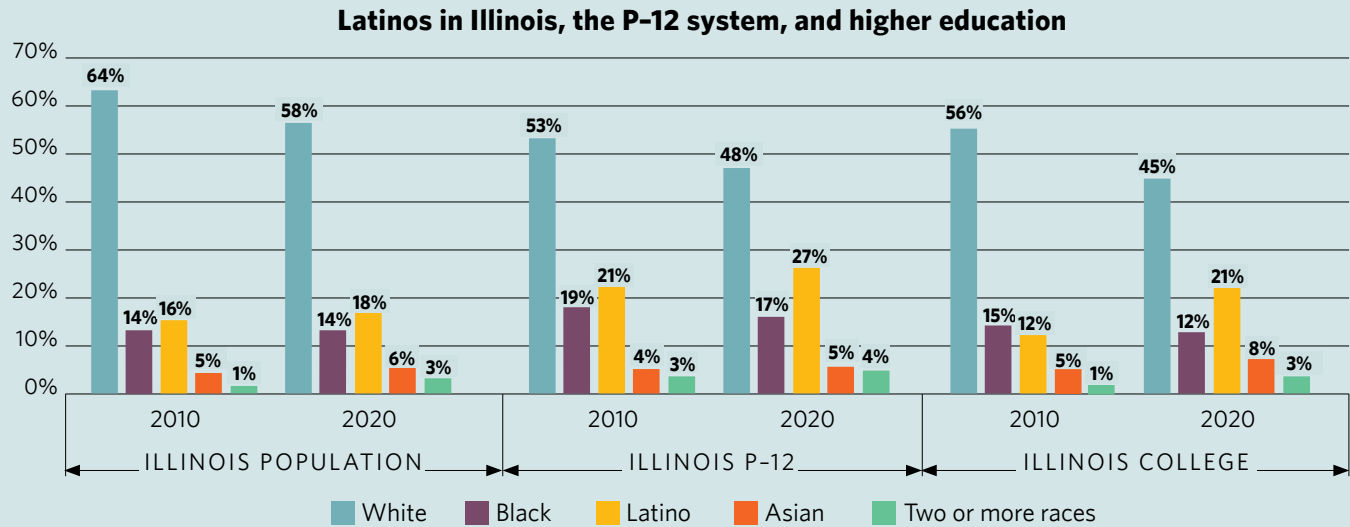


FIGURE 11

A growing presence: Latinos make up an increasingly large percentage of Illinois residents, public school populations, and college enrollments.



SOURCES: <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) report cards for 2009-10 and 2019-20 and Illinois Board of Higher Education enrollment in associate degree and bachelor’s degree programs from <https://www.ibhe.org/EnrollmentsDegrees/Search.aspx>

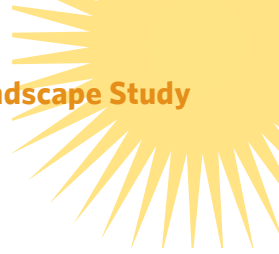
Educational Context

“The quality of higher education options for Latino students is connected to the K-12 and higher education system in each state, along with opportunities and constraints imposed by particular state laws that often drive higher education opportunity.”

— “Beyond the Tipping Point: Searching for a New Vision for Latino College Success in the United States,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Flores et al. 2021, 131)

Educational systems can create or hinder opportunities for students—especially for students from families with low incomes and limited educational backgrounds.

Illinois has made great strides in increasing educational equity by allocating more resources to early childhood education, the P-12 system, and higher education (Office of Management and Budget 2023). The State has also convened a Commission on Equitable Public University Funding, which has issued recommendations for future public university funding to the General Assembly (IBHE n.d.). Unlike some other states with large Latino populations, Illinois also provides bilingual educational programming for P-12 students whose first language is not English.

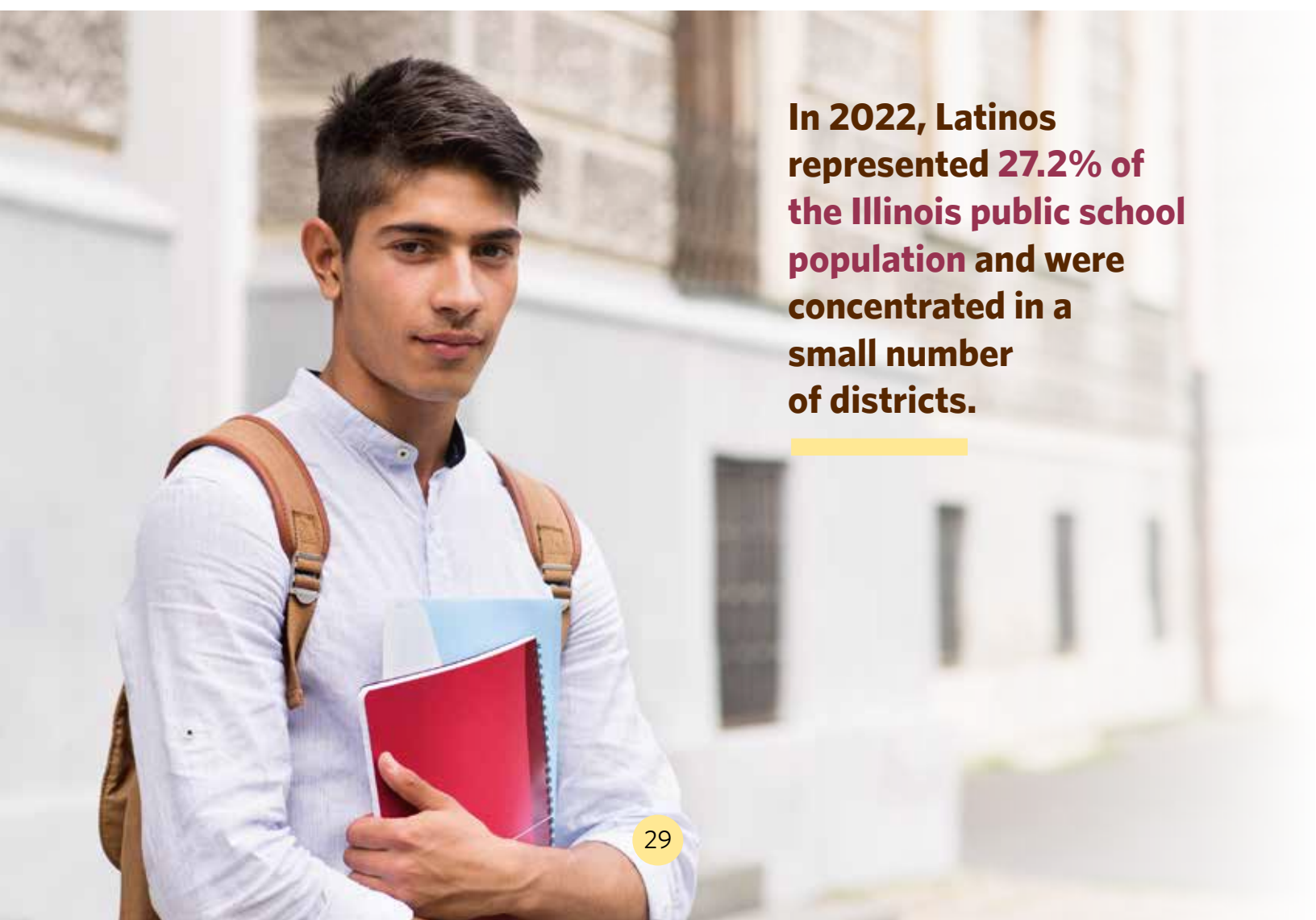


The State has also made efforts to strengthen its educational system and support higher educational attainment with “opportunity-enhancing policies” such as in-state tuition and financial aid for undocumented students (Flores et al. 2021), as well as benefit navigators and undocumented student liaisons at all public campuses.

But there is still room for improvement. The Illinois P-12 system is not adequately preparing all students for college, as is evidenced by the lack of alignment between high school graduation requirements and the recommended courses that enable students to qualify for admission at some four-year universities (see sidebar on page 33).

Latino P-12 Students

In 2022, Latinos represented 27.2% of the Illinois public school population (ISBE 2022) and were concentrated in a small number of districts. Fifty-one school districts educated 70% of Latino students and 11 districts educated 50% of Latino students (see Table 2 on page 30). These 11 districts were all located in northeast Illinois across Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake McHenry, Will, and Winnebago counties (ISBE 2021).



In 2022, Latinos represented 27.2% of the Illinois public school population and were concentrated in a small number of districts.

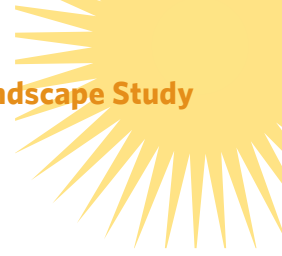
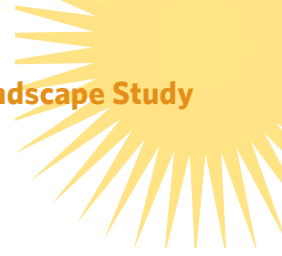


TABLE 2

Eleven school districts serve half of all Latino public school students in Illinois: These 11 districts are all located in northeast Illinois.

Illinois districts serving 50% of Latino public school students					
DISTRICT	CITY	COUNTY	ESTIMATED LATINO ENROLLMENT	PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICT STUDENTS WHO ARE LATINO	TOTAL ENROLLMENT
Chicago Public Schools	Chicago	Cook	158,631	47%	338,956
School District U-46	Elgin	Kane	20,101	56%	35,958
Waukegan Community Unit School District 60	Waukegan	Lake	11,419	80%	14,345
Aurora East Unit School District 131	Aurora	Kane	11,398	88%	12,982
Cicero School District 99	Cicero	Cook	9,626	97%	9,934
Community Unit School District 300	Algonquin	Kane	7,966	40%	19,815
Rockford School District 205	Rockford	Winnebago	7,748	30%	26,089
Valley View Community Unit School District 365U	Romeoville	Will	7,084	46%	15,333
J. Sterling Morton High School District 201	Cicero	Cook	7,010	92%	7,661
Joliet Public Schools District 86	Joliet	Will	6,656	65%	10,256
Aurora West Unit School District 129	Aurora	Kane	6,625	61%	10,932

SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Education, 2021



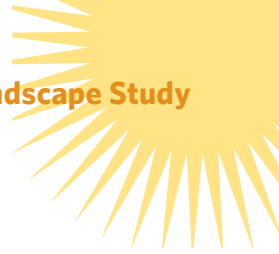
Latino College Students

Latinos represented 21% of all students enrolled in Illinois two- and four-year degree programs in SY 2020–21, with 48% in associate-degree programs and 52% in bachelor’s-degree programs. Of the 99,392 Latino undergraduates in Illinois, 46% attended 10 institutions of higher education. Six of these institutions were community colleges, three were public four-year colleges, and one was a private nonprofit four-year college. The City Colleges of Chicago public community college system educates the greatest number of Latinos in Illinois, with a student population of more than 11,000 (IBHE n.d.b) (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
The Top 10: Illinois colleges serving 46% of all Latino undergraduate students

Top 10 Illinois colleges and universities serving Latino students in SY 2020–21				
INSTITUTION	TYPE	COUNTY	NUMBER OF ENROLLED LATINOS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ARE LATINO
City Colleges of Chicago	2-year	Cook	11,585	52%
University of Illinois Chicago	4-year	Cook	7,811	35%
University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign	4-year	Champaign	4,759	14%
College of Lake County	2-year	Lake	3,960	42%
College of DuPage	2-year	DuPage	3,726	28%
DePaul University	4-year	Cook	3,092	22%
Joliet Junior College	2-year	Multiple	2,873	27%
Triton College	2-year	Cook	2,670	45%
Northern Illinois University	4-year	DeKalb	2,594	22%
Moraine Valley Community College	2-year	Cook	2,563	27%

SOURCE: Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2021



State Investments in Higher Education

Illinois experienced disinvestment in its higher education system for nearly two decades, from 2002 to 2021. The State’s purchasing power in 2021 was equal to that of 2002 (IBHE 2021). In a recent report commissioned by the Partnership for College Completion, the report’s authors noted that “Adequately funding public higher education should be seen as necessary to increasing college access, promoting student success, and improving the state’s regional competitiveness” (Fernandez, Hu, and Capaldi 2023, 4).

To meet rising costs while state appropriations remained flat, most Illinois colleges and universities were forced to increase tuition and fees. However, due to declining enrollments, tuition and fee hikes did not bridge the widening gap between stagnant state appropriations and the ever-increasing cost of higher education. Colleges and universities throughout the state were forced to make institutional cuts that had a profound impact on programming and student outcomes (Fernandez, Hu, and Capaldi 2023).



“Research shows that increasing spending (a) broadens access to higher education by increasing enrollment in both the current year and in future years and (b) supports success by giving institutions the resources to provide adequate course offerings and advising to help students graduate.”

— *Exploring Equitable Public Higher Education Funding Models in Illinois: Towards Equitably Funding Universities and Supporting Students*, Partnership for College Completion (Fernandez, Ju, and Capaldi 2023, 7)

This decades-long disinvestment in higher education ended with new state leadership. Governor J.B. Pritzker and Illinois state legislators allocated \$2.53 billion for higher education in FY 2024 (IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC 2023). This \$2.53 billion allocation for higher education in FY 2024 includes an additional \$100 million for the Monetary Award Program (MAP); an increase of \$80.5 million for public universities; \$19.4 million in additional funding for community colleges; an increase of \$3.8 million for the Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI) Scholarship Program; and an increase of \$15 million for the AIM HIGH Program, which provides merit-based awards to encourage high-achieving students to attend an in-state university, help defray the cost of a college education and reduce student loan debt. The maximum MAP award in FY 2024 will cover about 60% of the average tuition and fees at a community college and approximately 51% of tuition and fees at a public four-year university in Illinois (IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC 2023). ✨

Addressing the Mismatch

Why it's so important to align high school practices with postsecondary expectations

WHY DO SO MANY Illinois high school students encounter roadblocks on their college journeys? The answer to this question is complex, but one major contributing factor stands out: a lack of alignment between high school graduation requirements and postsecondary expectations.

How can we address this mismatch? Collaboration is key: P-12 school districts and institutions of higher education should work together to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet college admissions criteria. In other words, the two systems should be better aligned.

To get a better sense of the current misalignment between the two systems, it helps to compare Illinois high school graduation requirements with public and private university recommendations. See Table 4 on page 34 for a side-by-side comparison of Illinois high school graduation requirements and the courses recommended (and often required) by local public and private universities.

Table 4 shows in graphic detail where high school graduation requirements fall short: Universities recommend that high school students complete more courses in science, social studies, and language (note that the high school graduation requirement for language does



TABLE 4

The alignment gap: High school graduation requirements are not aligned with the entrance requirements of postsecondary institutions.

Comparison of Illinois high school graduation and postsecondary requirements			
SUBJECT	ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (NUMBER OF YEARS)	UIC AND DEPAUL (NUMBER OF YEARS)	UIC STEM (NUMBER OF YEARS)
English	4	4	4
Mathematics	3	3	4
Science	2* (lab SY 2024-25)	3	4
Social Studies	2	3	3
Language	2* (SY 2028-29)	2	2

Note on the three years of math graduation requirement: Algebra I or integrated equivalent (1 year); no specified course, including geometry content (1 year); Advanced Placement computer science is eligible

*In SY 2024-25, the graduation requirement for science will change from two years of science to two years of laboratory science. In SY 2028-29, the language requirement will change from no requirement to a two-year requirement.

SOURCES: Illinois State Board of Education Graduation requirements, 2022; Recommended high school courses (<https://admissions.uic.edu/undergraduate/requirements-deadlines/first-year-requirements>, <https://www.depaul.edu/admission-and-aid/types-of-admission/freshman-student/Pages/default.aspx>)

not go into effect until SY 2028-29). High school students who intend to pursue STEM majors may be at an even greater disadvantage.

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) became aware of this mismatch in the late 1990s and increased the system’s graduation requirements in the early 2000s to bring them into better alignment with the city’s public and private universities (Roderick et al. 2006).

What does this lack of alignment mean for students—especially Latino students who are often the first in their families to pursue a higher education? Often, these students must rely on the advice of college counselors and teachers, as well as their own knowledge and appetite for academic rigor as they navigate the road to higher education.

But alignment gaps can also become roadblocks if students lack the knowledge they need to choose courses aligned with their college and career ambitions, if students simply opt for less strenuous course loads, or if school staff members lack the resources they need to help students chart successful college journeys.

College Access and Completion Outcomes for Latinos in Illinois

As noted in Chapter 3, Latinos make up an increasing proportion of the Illinois population and our state's college populations. However, their lower high school graduation rate, lower enrollments at four-year colleges, and lower rate of degree-attainment all point to a group with unique life circumstances. Some may have immigrated to the U.S. as adults who had limited access to educational opportunities in their homelands. Some may have attended high schools with limited resources, and others may be the first in their families to go to college.

These educational disparities become apparent as we compare the educational attainment of all Illinois residents ages 25–64 with Illinois Latinos in the same age demographic (see Figure 12 on page 36). Twenty-five percent of Illinois Latinos aged 25–64 did not complete high school, compared to 9% of Illinois residents overall. Thirty-one percent of Latino adults have a high school diploma or equivalent, but no college, compared to 23% of Illinois adults overall. In Illinois, only 20% of Latinos ages 25–64 have earned bachelor's degrees, compared to 40% of adults across all racial/ethnic groups. (See Appendix B for Latino educational attainment data by subgroup.)

In Illinois, only 20% of Latinos ages 25–64 have earned bachelor's degrees, compared to 40% of adults across all racial/ethnic groups.



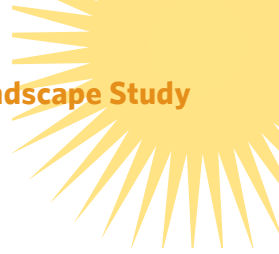
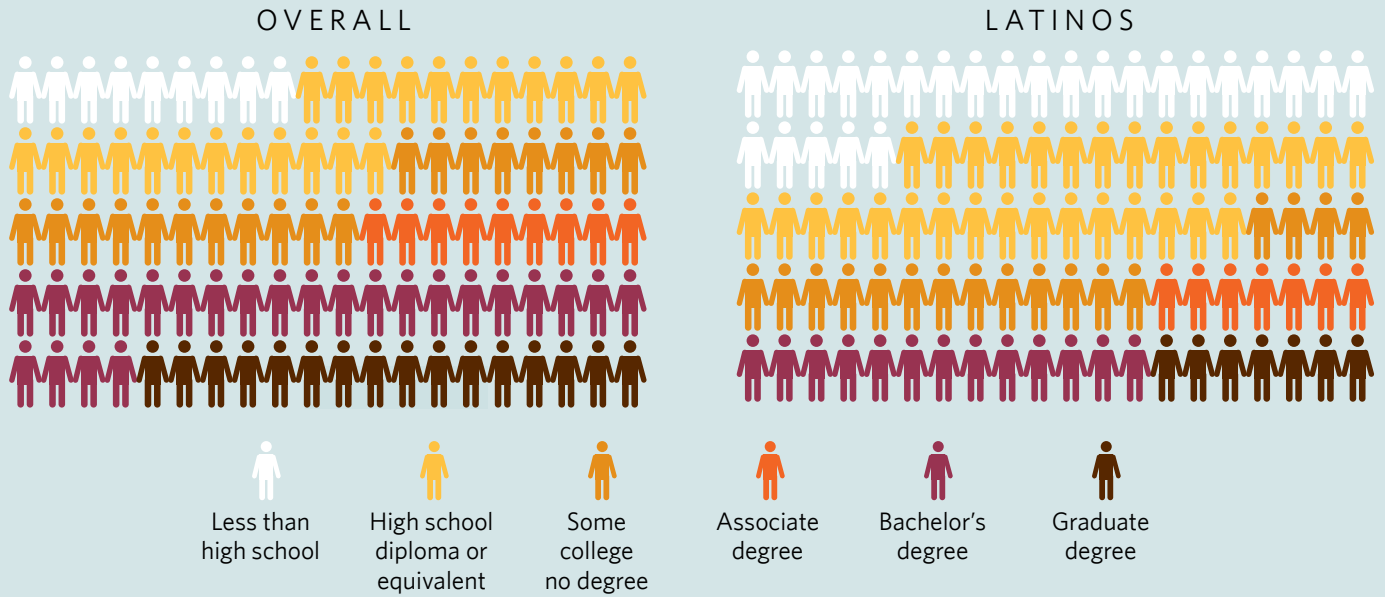


FIGURE 12

Latinos have lower educational attainment: More than half of Latino adults in Illinois have a high school degree or less, compared to about a third of Illinois adults overall. About a quarter of Illinois Latinos have an associate degree or higher.

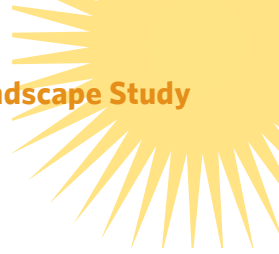
Educational attainment of all Illinois residents aged 25-64 vs. Illinois Latinos 25-64: 2021



SOURCE: Elaborated by IWERC using 2021 one-year estimates, ACS public-use microdata set, adjusted to include 25-64 population in Illinois.²

More than a decade ago, the State of Illinois set an ambitious goal to raise its educational attainment rate to 60% by 2025. The Lumina Foundation tracked progress toward this goal over time for all racial/ethnic groups and found that Illinois increased its educational attainment rate (associate degree or higher) for all adults aged 25-64 from 41% in 2009 to 56.9% in 2021 (Lumina Foundation n.d.)—just 3.1% short of the State’s goal of 60% by 2025.

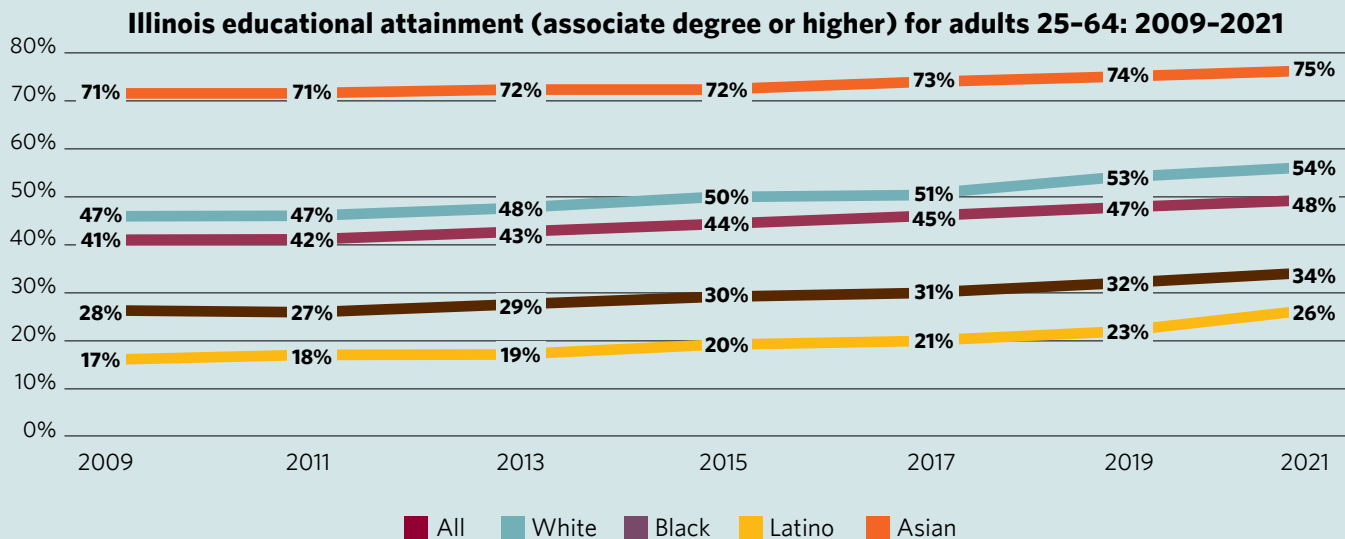




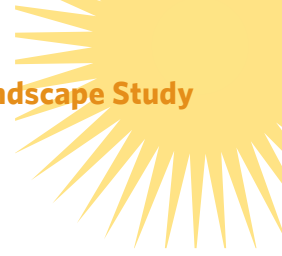
However, Latinos had the lowest rate of degree attainment (Lumina Foundation n.d.). The data in Figure 13 shows that Latinos have increased their college attainment (associate degree or higher) from 17% in 2009 to 26% in 2021. Illinois has not set specific postsecondary goals by race/ethnicity, although the Illinois Board of Higher Education has identified equity in college completion as one of its core goals (IBHE 2021).

FIGURE 13

Trending upward but still behind: Latinos had the lowest rate of educational attainment (associate degree or higher) between 2009 and 2021.



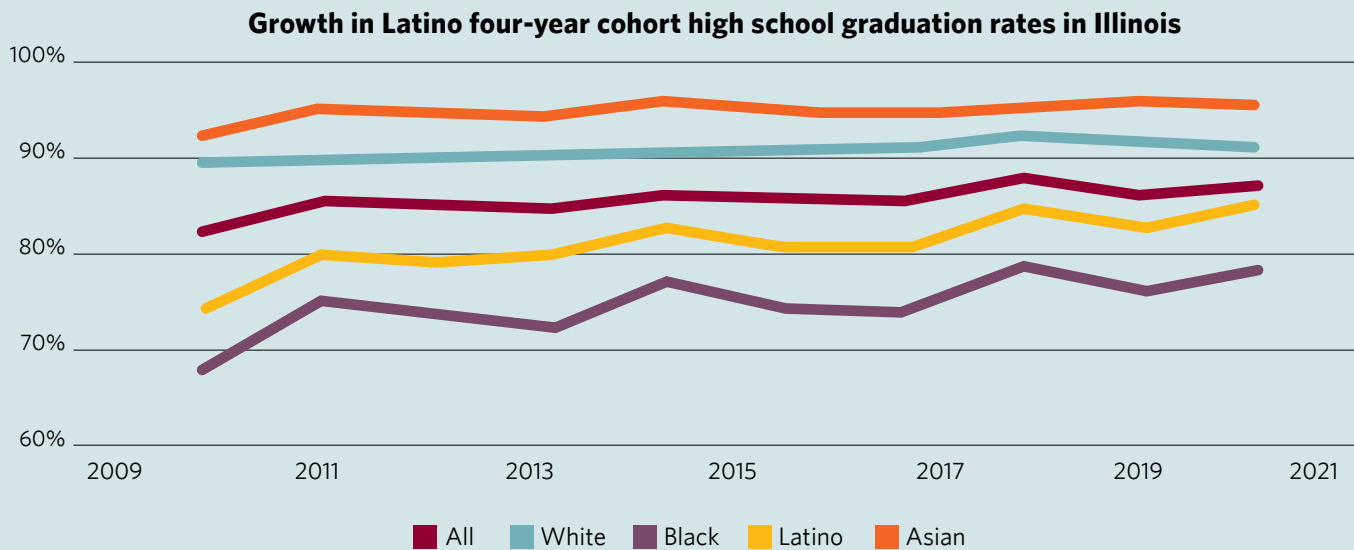
SOURCE: Lumina Foundation, n.d.



Educational attainment is influenced by many factors, from high school graduation rates to college retention. The four-year Latino high school graduation rate data for Illinois does not follow the same steady upward trajectory as the national data, but it does show an increase from 76.3% for Latino students entering high school in 2009 to 85.1% for Latinos entering high school in 2018 (ISBE n.d.) (see Figure 14).

FIGURE 14

A growing number of high school graduates: Latino cohort high school graduation rates increased by 11.5% over the course of a decade.

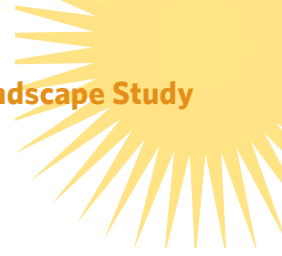


SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.

Although Latino high school graduation rates are trending upward, college enrollment remains a troubling transition point.

The Illinois State Board of Education currently reports on the percentage of graduates who enroll in any postsecondary educational institution within a 12-month period after high school graduation. This includes two- and four-year public and private institutions, but the data is not reported by race and ethnicity. In 2022, 64.3% of high school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months, compared to 68.7% in 2014 (ISBE 2022 and 2014).

According to Illinois data on postsecondary enrollment, students at schools with Latino enrollments of 50% or more enroll at four-year colleges and universities at lower rates



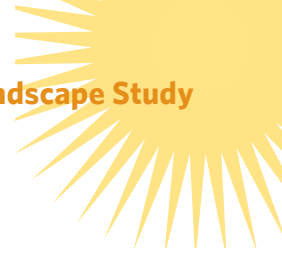
(see Table 5). A higher percentage of students from these schools also require remedial coursework once they get to college, indicating a potential need for high schools to better prepare Latino students for college coursework and provide more intensive college counseling to keep them on track as they navigate the college search, selection, and application process.

TABLE 5
Graduates from high schools with more Latino students have lower academic attainment:
 Students at high schools with Latino enrollments of 50% or more are less likely to enroll in four-year colleges and universities and more likely to require remedial coursework for postsecondary success.

Postsecondary enrollments and college destinations by school demographics: 2021				
HIGH SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS	GRADUATE ENROLLMENT AT ANY POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION	GRADUATE ENROLLMENT AT A FOUR-YEAR POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION	GRADUATE ENROLLMENT AT A TWO-YEAR POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION	GRADUATES ENROLLED IN POSTSECONDARY REMEDIAL COURSEWORK
All high schools	59%	30%	29%	27%
High schools with Latino student populations of 25% or more	58%	31%	28%	39%
High schools with Latino student populations of 50% or more	54%	26%	28%	48%
High schools with Latino student populations of 75% or more	53%	25%	28%	54%

Note: These are averages of enrollment by school.
 SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Education, 2022

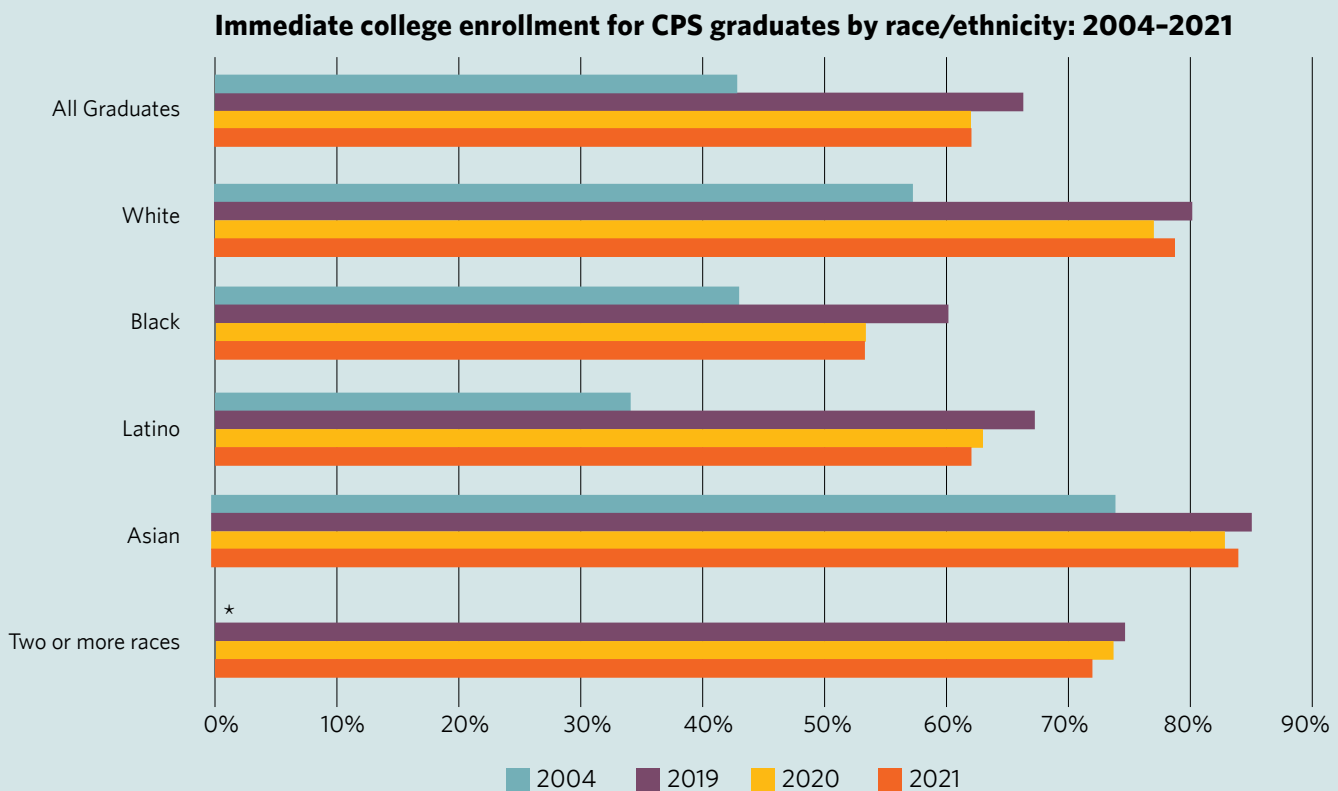
The Chicago Public School system has tracked and reported college enrollment by race/ethnicity since 2004. Figure 15 on page 40 shows significant changes in this outcome (CPS n.d.) due to investments in college counseling, professional development for teachers,



and access to rigorous high school coursework (Bryk et al. 2023). Although Latino college enrollments have increased more than any other racial/ethnic group, they have not yet begun to recover from pandemic-related enrollment declines.

FIGURE 15

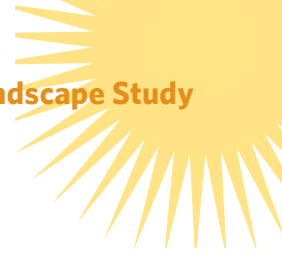
Promising trends in college enrollments: Despite the pandemic, 27.1% more Latinos enrolled in college in 2021 than in 2004.



*2004 data not available for two or more races

SOURCES: Chicago Public Schools, 2004 press release and <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/metrics/>

Timely enrollment in a four-year postsecondary institution matters for high school graduates. The UChicago Consortium on School Research has studied the college trajectories of CPS students since 2004. According to a college pathways analysis conducted by the Consortium and the To & Through Project, only 20% of the Latinos who enrolled at two-year colleges immediately after high school transferred to a four-year college within six years—and only 7% completed a bachelor’s degree (Nagoaka et al. 2021). The analysis also showed that most students who completed a bachelor’s degree started at four-year colleges and remained continuously enrolled. This held true across all racial/ethnic groups, including Latinos. The data also revealed that many students stop out, which lowers the rate of degree attainment (Nagoaka et al. 2021).



“Eighty-three percent of immediate two-year college enrollees stopped out at least once within six years, as did 51 percent of immediate four-year college enrollees. For most students, this stop out occurred during the first two years of college. Approximately half of students who stop out do re-enroll, which indicates a desire to stay engaged with the post-secondary system. Importantly, however, around 90 percent of students who took at least one semester off from college did not complete a credential within six years.”

(Nagaoka et al. 2021, 3)

Table 6 summarizes the disparity in educational outcomes at every level with the most current data available. The Illinois Board of Higher Education analyzed and reported on college graduation rates in 2020 for its strategic planning process.

TABLE 6

After high school, educational attainment declines: Eighty-five percent of Latino students graduate from high school, but degree attainment drops sharply once they move on to higher education: Only 25% graduate from two-year institutions, and 51% graduate from public four-year institutions.

Important indicators on the pathway to and through college			
	WHITE	BLACK	LATINO
High school graduation rate (four-year)	91%	80%	85%
Overall college-enrollment rate	66%	45%	50%
Two-year college-enrollment rate	23%	12%	23%
Four-year college-enrollment rate	43%	33%	26%
Remedial education placements at Illinois public colleges	5%	15%	12%
First-year retention rate at Illinois public colleges	82%	62%	75%
Community college graduation rate	38%	14%	25%
Public university graduation rate	68%	33%	51%
Private nonprofit university graduation rate	70%	38%	59%
For-profit college graduation rate	30%	19%	32%

SOURCES: Illinois Report Card, 2022; IBHE Data Points, 2023 for SY 2020–21 high school graduation; Ostro, 2020

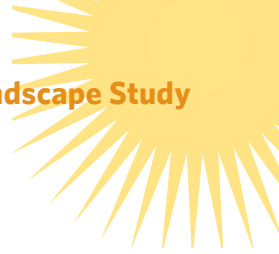


TABLE 7

Low transfer rates indicate a need for more supportive college pathways: Only 10–13% of full-time Latino students at two-year colleges transfer to four-year postsecondary institutions.

Percentage of Illinois students transferring from two-year colleges to four-year postsecondary institutions: 2015 cohort						
STUDENT GROUP	WHITE STUDENTS		BLACK STUDENTS		LATINO STUDENTS	
	<AA	With AA	<AA	With AA	<AA	With AA
First-time full-time students	19%	15%	19%	5%	13%	10%
First-time part-time students	13%	3%	15%	1%	10%	3%

SOURCE: National Student Clearinghouse, 2022

Many young adults start their college journeys at local community colleges. Some make this choice because it is more affordable, closer to home, or easier to navigate. Nationally, 78% of all community college students intend to transfer to a four-year college or university. However, only 31% of all community college students manage to make this leap (Garcia and Adkins 2021). In Illinois, a smaller percentage of students across all racial/ethnic groups transfer from two-year colleges to four-year colleges. Latino students have some of the lowest transfer rates (see Table 7). ✨

Literature Review: Key Findings

THE JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH COLLEGE is full of systemic inequities that impede the progress of low-income, first-generation college students across multiple races and ethnicities. However, Latinos face some unique challenges.

As noted in the introduction to this report, the Latino Policy Forum commissioned the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC) to conduct a series of literature reviews to identify the key issues faced by Latino students as they navigate the college preparatory process, enroll in college, move toward degree completion, and enter the workforce.

Lopez Strategic Solutions also interviewed college and college advocacy staff and conducted focus groups with Latino college students and graduates, Latinos with some college but no credentials, and parents of Latino high school and college students. (See Appendix A for the methodology of the Illinois Latino College Landscape Study.)

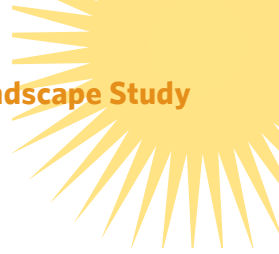
Through the literature review, the IWERC team identified six key factors that influence Latino college enrollment and completion:

- 1 **Academic preparation for college**
- 2 **High school counseling and other support for college**
- 3 **Navigating the pathway to and through college**
- 4 **Understanding college financing**
- 5 **The importance of family during the college journey**
- 6 **The post-college landscape**

These factors also came up in the focus groups as Latino college students, graduates, and their parents discussed their lived experiences in the U.S. educational system.

1 Academic Preparation for College

Inadequate preparation for college was brought up repeatedly by the college students and college graduates in the focus groups. These participants reported that they were not well prepared for the rigors of college coursework. This was true even for students who had completed Advanced Placement courses.



“Once I enrolled in college, I realized that I was ill-equipped to tackle college-level courses. It felt like I was always playing catch-up.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“My first college chemistry lab, everyone knew what they were doing because they had labs in high school. On the other hand, I was scared to break something.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“Professors sometimes have the expectation that you have been familiarized with a concept, famous philosopher, etc., before college.”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

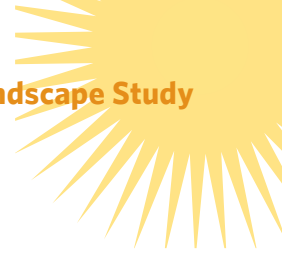
“Create a culture of high academic expectations. Many of us went to all Latino/Black/Brown high schools, and sometimes expectations for us are low.”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

Academic preparation for college can be measured in a variety of ways, from reviewing the number and type of courses taken to evaluating test scores and grade-point averages. Enrollment in rigorous high school courses—including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual-credit (DC), and dual-enrollment (DE)—is associated with four-year college enrollment, first-year college performance, reduced remedial coursework, and college completion (Allen and Dadgar 2012; An 2013; Beard et al. 2019; Blankenberger et al. 2017; Britton et al. 2019; Dash 2017; Giani et al. 2014; Grubb et al. 2017; Henneberger et al. 2018; Miller et al. 2018; Naff et al. 2021; Naff 2022; Roderick et al. 2006; Rodriguez and McGuire 2019; Speroni 2011; Struhl and Vargas 2012; Taylor 2015; Warren and Goins 2019).

The data in Table 8 on page 45 compares the percentage of students in Advanced Placement and dual-credit courses to their percentage of school enrollment and reveals gaps in rigorous





course-taking for Illinois Latino students in SY 2017-18. Latino and Black students were underrepresented, while Asian and White students were overrepresented or matched their enrollment makeup. This gap is caused by two factors: a lack of opportunity because the high school does not offer these courses or a lack of enrollment when the courses are offered (Fink 2021).

TABLE 8

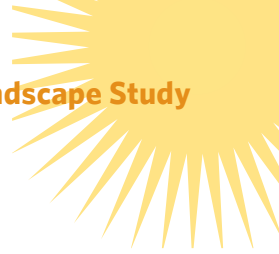
Lower AP and dual-credit enrollments: Although Latinos represented 25.3% of all high school students in Illinois in SY 2017-18, they represented only 23.5% of AP students and 19.1% of dual-credit students.

Percentage of students enrolled in AP and dual-credit courses by race and ethnicity: SY 2017-18			
RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP	% SCHOOL POPULATION	% ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSE-TAKERS	% DUAL-CREDIT COURSE-TAKERS
Latino	25.3%	23.5%	19.1%
Asian	5.0%	10.6%	5.0%
Black	16.3%	9.7%	10.5%
Multiracial	3.0%	3.3%	2.8%
White	50.0%	52.5%	62.4%

SOURCE: Fink, 2021

More recent AP data from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) revealed that Latino student participation in AP courses rose dramatically—from 20% to 26%—between SY 2015-16 and SY 2020-21. During that same time period, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in dual-credit courses rose from 16% to 22% (ISBE 2016 and 2021).

Placement in more difficult math courses, such as trigonometry and calculus, is also related to four-year college-going (Byun et al. 2014). Nationally, Latino high school graduates were less likely to take Algebra 2 and calculus than their White and Asian peers. In 2019, 82% of Latino graduates took Algebra 2 (including courses that taught Algebra 2 and trigonometry) and 9% took calculus, compared to White graduates (87% and 18% respectively), and Asian graduates (88% and 46% respectively) (NCES 2021). A recent study of Los Angeles Unified first-time 11th graders, whose sample was 76% Latino, found that students who took a senior-



year math class were more likely to enroll in any college or enroll in a four-year college and had improved retention rates into the second year of college (Wainstein et al. 2023).

Research has shown that GPA is a better indicator of high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation than test scores (Roderick et al. 2006; Easton, Johnson, and Sartain 2017). In fact, Roderick et al. reported the following:

“We find that grades are a central determinant of college access and completion. Students who leave CPS with average GPAs lower than 3.0 are very unlikely to graduate from college. ... It is grades rather than test scores that explain the lower college attendance and completion rates of male students.”

— *From High School to the Future: A First Look at Chicago Public Schools Graduates’ College Enrollment, College Preparation, and Graduation from Four-Year Colleges*, UChicago Consortium on School Research (Roderick et al. 2006, 86)

Roderick et al. (2006) also found that the combination of high GPAs, AP/honors enrollments, and high test scores resulted in higher college graduation rates for Chicago Public School graduates.

In summary, as the following quote notes, high school course-taking and performance have a significant impact on college access and completion:

“The conclusion of our first report, confirming a significant body of research on the link between high school performance and college access and graduation, is that increasing qualifications is the most important strategy for CPS students to improve college participation, access to four-year and more selective colleges, and ultimately college graduation rates.”

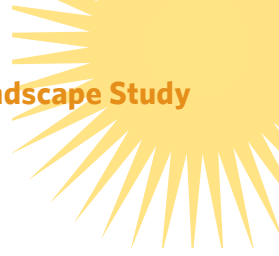
— *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*, UChicago Consortium on School Research (Roderick et al. 2008, 1)



2 High School Counseling and Other Support for College

Students in the focus groups discussed the lack of support for college planning, as well as their counselors’ high caseloads. On the plus side, some of these students benefited from the support of external organizations such as Chicago Scholars.

The graduate quoted on page 47, who attended a suburban high school, did not have the additional support of an external organization.

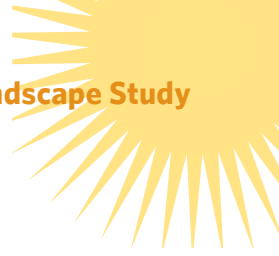


“One of the biggest things that I think is crucial [for college access and success] is the mentoring and having the conversation early. I don’t think that necessarily happened early enough for me. I had friends in high school [who] already knew where they were going to apply, what they needed to do, their parents already had college funds. And I just don’t think that conversation . . . happens early enough.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

College planning and support may come from multiple sources, including teachers, counselors, and nonprofit college support organizations. The literature points to teachers of color being important for students’ postsecondary enrollment. Having a teacher of the same racial/ethnic background in high school increases the likelihood of college enrollment for Black and Latino students, especially in the STEM disciplines (Delhommer 2022; Sass 2015). Teachers can also support students in developing a college-going identity (Flores et al. 2021). Latino teachers support Latino student success. However, Illinois has a much smaller percentage of Latino teachers (8%) than Latino students (27.2%) (ISBE 2022). It is worth noting, however, that the percentage of Latino teachers in Illinois school districts rises with the percentage of Latino students. Teachers in Latino-serving school districts are also less likely to be novice teachers or teachers with provisional licenses than in other districts (ISBE 2021).





Counselors play a key role in supporting students as they prepare for college (Chlup et al. 2021), by offering guidance on course selection, assisting with college applications, and writing letters of recommendation. This support requires an investment of time—a precious commodity in schools with a high ratio of students to counselors.

A 2021 *Chalkbeat Chicago* article noted that the average student-to-counselor ratio is higher at majority-Latino elementary and high schools in Chicago than at other schools—including majority-Black schools. In majority-Latino Chicago high schools in SY 2020-21, the average student-to-counselor ratio was 277 students to one counselor, compared to the average CPS high school ratio of 250 students per counselor (Koumpilova 2021). As the article’s author noted, there was also a racial/ethnic mismatch between Chicago high school counselors and the students they served: Latino students comprised 46.6% of the high school population, yet only 20% of all high school counselors shared their Latino heritage.



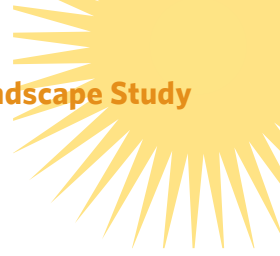
In 2021, ISBE reported an average caseload of 579 students per counselor for all Illinois school districts (One Goal 2021). Both the average majority-Latino Chicago high schools and average Illinois student-to-counselor ratios are above the ratio of 250 students per counselor recommended by the American School Counselor Association (n.d.).

For Latino students, these high counselor caseloads are particularly problematic. Roderick et al. noted the important role that teachers and other school personnel play in helping students navigate the college search, selection, and application process:

“First-generation college students are especially dependent upon their teachers and other school personnel in making college enrollment decisions and negotiating the college application process. This suggests an important role for high schools in making sure that Latino students are getting information, guidance, and concrete support to attend college.”

— *From High School to the Future: A First Look at Chicago Public School Graduates’ College Enrollment, College Preparation, and Graduation from Four-Year Colleges*, UChicago Consortium on School Research (Roderick et al. 2006, 89)

Chlup et al. (2021) noted that Latino students desire more opportunities for one-on-one postsecondary counseling, rather than group information sessions. Consider the quote on page 49 by a student interviewed by the article’s authors:



“We’ve had one trip [to visit a university setting], but typically when you [want to] get information, sometimes the counselors are there, sometimes they’re not, or they have a special room for colleges over here. You try to get information or they’re not really there, or either they’re there but they’re so busy that they can’t attend [to] you so I mean, you try to get it but sometimes it’s not possible to get information. Just wanted to make that clear... so they’re just leaving [out students not in Advanced Placement classes].”

— “Latina/o High School Students’ Perceptions and Experiences Obtaining Information About Going to College: A Qualitative Study for Understanding,” *Journal of Latinos and Education* (Chlup et al. 2021, 153)

As noted earlier, external organizations play an important role in augmenting the counseling support available to high school students (Duncheon and Relles 2018). In Illinois, however, most of these nonprofits are located within Chicago city limits. In 2021, the Illinois State Board of Education launched a partnership with the college-access nonprofit One Goal to develop effective and systemic postsecondary pathway strategies for school districts with low college enrollment rates outside of Chicago (One Goal 2021). Many of these districts serve the greatest number of Latino students.

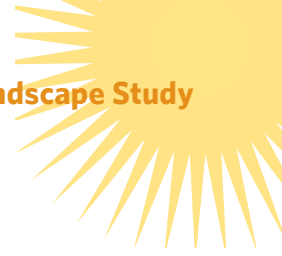
Navigating the Pathway to and Through College

In the Latino Policy Forum focus groups, college students and graduates reported that they were not aware of various programs or scholarships until it was too late to take advantage of them, and stated that they had limited access to academic advising. Some confided that they had to actively seek out information about the rules and procedures for undocumented students or parents. These students felt uncomfortable when they broached this issue and stated that they would have preferred to have this information provided outright. In Illinois, one in every 40 students is undocumented—for a total of 17,757 students (Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and New American Economy 2021).

Focus group participants discussed the challenges of navigating college with insufficient access to information and support:

“I had to be the person who connected with my academic advisor versus having [the advisor check in with me]. I definitely understand that it’s a college setting. You’re becoming an adult, you’re figuring [it] out, you’re navigating those things. But I do think that might be where some people could struggle in a class and then kind of drop off because [you] don’t feel that support unless you actually do the reaching out yourself. But I think it has to be on both ends.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE



“I remember my school had one workshop where parents could come in if they had questions, but it was not bilingual. ...Thankfully, I have an older brother who speaks English, so I went with him because we had a lot of questions about our financial situation and stuff like that. But, obviously, the language barrier . . . impacted us a lot.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

Students also noted that they didn’t feel a sense of belonging and reported the following challenges:

“Finding community at a PWI [Predominantly White Institution].”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

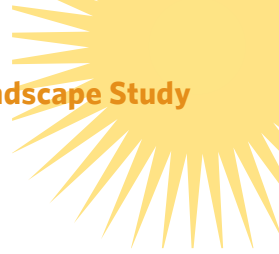
“Fitting in . . . a majority of the student population is very wealthy and privileged, which is different from the kind of environment I have grown up in.”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

College students and graduates recognized that there was a lot they didn’t know. They needed college staff to be more proactive about sharing information, programs, and advice—and they felt that high schools should incorporate college planning into the school day, offer more workshops and other resources for students and parents, and deliver all of these resources in Spanish, as well as in English.

According to the literature, Latino students reported a limited understanding of how colleges work—from transfer expectations to the roles of faculty members, counselors, advisors, and other school personnel. Families often lacked this college-specific navigational capital as well (Genthe and Harrington 2022; Jabbar et al. 2019; Michel and Durdella 2019; Perez and Ceja 2010; Saenz et al. 2018; Syed et al. 2011). The literature also identified possible solutions, including collaborations between high schools and higher education; orientation programs for students and their families; intentional faculty, counselor, and peer connections; and more Latino advisors and faculty members. If Latino students can connect with a Latino community on campus—particularly at a predominantly White institution—they may be better able to cope with the demands of college life and less likely to leave (Hernandez 2000). When Latino students had positive feelings about the campus culture and racial climate at their college or university, they were more likely to persist in their studies and complete their degrees (Museus et al. 2008).

Key transition points and choices can also have a direct impact on college attendance and persistence. The phenomenon known as “summer melt” (when students do not complete key steps after being admitted to a postsecondary institution and subsequently do not enroll in the fall) affects college enrollment (Crisp and Nora 2010). Delaying enrollment after high school and registering late for a semester can have a negative impact on college persistence



(Crisp and Nora 2010). Late registration, sometimes due to institutional financial holds, can place students on delayed graduation trajectories if courses are full and they must wait until these courses are offered the following year. Finally, dropping classes can further stall progress toward credit accrual. Many of these issues can result in a student stopping out (Farruggia et al. 2020; Perez and Ceja 2010).

To address the challenges posed by these transition points, the literature suggests developing partnerships between high schools and higher education to monitor financial aid and other concerns in the summer prior to first-time enrollment (Crisp and Nora 2010). Colleges should also consider setting up early alert systems that identify “early-warning indicators” and enlist college advisors to monitor these indicators (Crisp and Nora 2010; Farruggia et al. 2020). The authors also recommend that school personnel educate students about these critical transition points during high school counseling sessions and college orientation programs.

4 Understanding College Financing

Focus group participants (students, graduates, and parents) had a lot to say about financing college. Below are some quotes that provide insights into the issues faced by the Latino community, such as working to pay for college, anxiety about college financing, and becoming a resource for others in their families. Parents spoke about wanting to do everything possible to help their children get a higher education.

“I worked almost full-time in college at a retail job to help my family financially at home. This time could have been used to work on my own educational goals (internships, etc.)”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“I didn’t want to put too much pressure on my parents [because they are] low-income. I really checked for a college they can afford.”

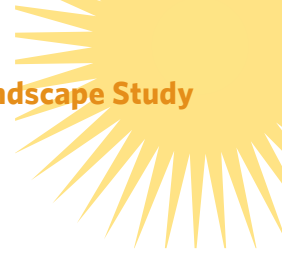
— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

“My parents didn’t have any knowledge about [college and financial-aid applications] and I had to teach myself that. Then I became a resource for my cousins and my siblings, anyone who had [an] interest ... to try to make it a little bit more accessible or straightforward for my family.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“At this point, I have a lot of student loans. So, I want to prevent that for my daughters. I don’t want them to have student loans, and I want them to be more educated and have good grades so they can have more opportunities with scholarships.”

— MOTHER OF A LATINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT



Across the country, 70% of undergraduates received some type of financial aid, with 62% receiving grants. In Illinois, 60% of undergraduates received financial aid and 53% received grants (Burns et al. 2022).

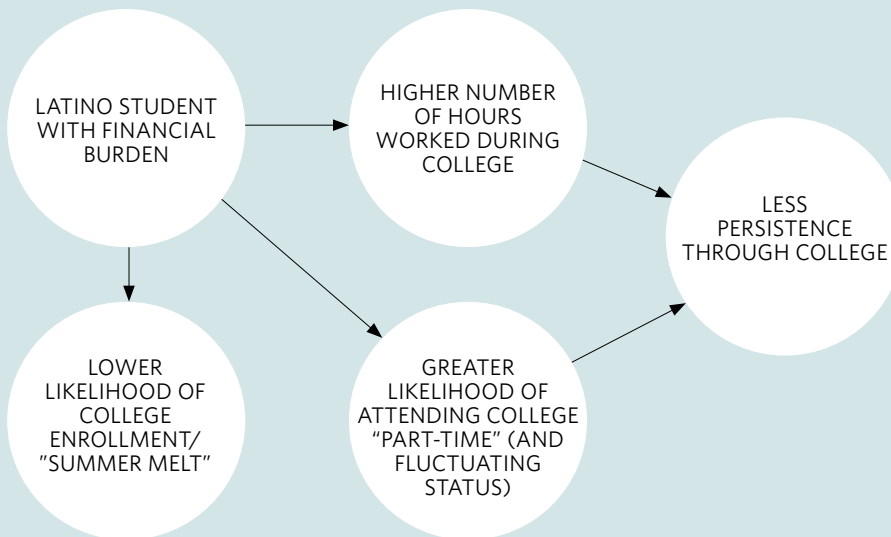
Illinois mandates that students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or file a waiver with the school district to comply with the state’s high school graduation requirements (ISBE 2022a). The implementation of this policy helped ensure that more students obtained the aid that they were eligible to receive. However, the FAFSA isn’t easy to complete—as is evidenced by the U.S. Department of Education’s current effort to simplify the application. A disproportionate percentage of low-income students must also endure an audit-like process known as “verification” before they can receive their awards. This process places a significant burden on students, families, and college staff (NCAN and NASFAA 2022).

The college financing hurdle—which can discourage Latino students from enrolling in college, even after they have been admitted—is a contributing factor to the “summer melt” phenomenon (see Figure 16). To avoid taking on too much college debt, Latinos work long hours (with 32% working 40+ hours a week), resulting in lower college persistence (Excelencia in Education 2019).

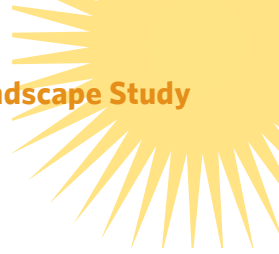
FIGURE 16

The connection between college financing, immediate college enrollment, and college persistence: Low-income Latino students are less likely to enroll in college or persist in their studies due to financial pressures.

The relationship between college financing and college persistence



SOURCE:
Elaborated by IWERC based on findings from Crisp et al. 2015; Crisp and Nora 2010; Genthe and Harrington 2022; Langenkamp and Hoyt 2019; Margarit and Kennedy 2019; Perez and Ceja 2010; Salinas Jr and Hidrowoh 2017.



Many Latino students and their parents lack access to financial advising in high school and college settings (Genthe and Harrington 2022; George-Jackson and Gast 2015). As a result, Latinos often harbor misconceptions about college financing, such as the belief that scholarships are only available to students with exceptional abilities or grades. Black and Latino parents were the most likely to harbor this belief, at 50% and 52% respectively (Ipsos 2022). Nationally, in 2015–16, Latino undergraduates were the least likely to receive institutional merit aid, with 7% receiving this aid compared to 14% of White students (U.S. Department of Education 2019).



As Latino students make college enrollment decisions, they look carefully at their financial-aid awards (Santos and Sáenz 2013) and their long-term debt outlook (McDonough 2015). What they may not consider is that a “four-year college graduate who enrolls at age 18 can expect to earn enough by age 34 to compensate for the direct and opportunity costs of attending college.” (Ma, J. and Pender, M. 2023)

Research also indicates that financial aid—particularly need-based aid—increases Latino student success and leads to more full-time enrollment and fewer working hours (Crisp et al. 2015).

5 The Importance of Family During the College Journey

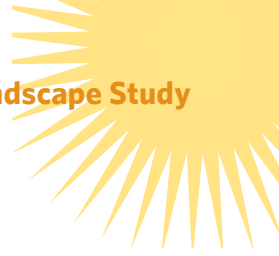
In the focus groups, Latino students talked about seeking a college degree to realize their own dreams of a college education—but also to fulfill their parents’ dreams and to benefit their communities. Parents talked about wanting more for their children and trying to support them in their college journeys as much as possible. College students also talked about helping other young people in their families realize the dream of college education by providing support and offering advice.

“As Latinos in higher education, the stakes are higher for us. It feels like we are not only doing this for ourselves but for our families, our home countries, and our people. Our need to succeed is great because, if we don’t, it feels like we will be failing not just ourselves, but our culture.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“I’ve always [had] this intention and this aspiration to give myself and my children a better education, more than what I acquired.”

— FATHER OF A LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT



“Growing up, it was difficult for me. My parents couldn’t give me the best education, so I made a promise to myself to always do better with my kids.”

— FATHER OF A LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

“I started communicating these aspirations to them, from when they were in elementary, then high school. You are going to do better, you’re going to go further in education, you have to get the best.”

— FATHER OF A LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

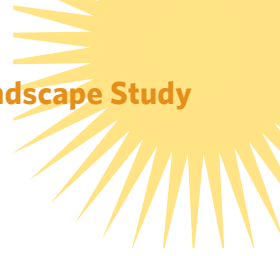
“Because I always tell them, if you have a good education, it gives you a better chance in the community to achieve whatever you feel, whatever your aspiration is. So, I started letting them know during high school.”

— FATHER OF A LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

As these quotes convey, many Latino parents have high aspirations for their children—and many young Latinos aspire to attend college (Roderick et al 2006; Stepler 2016; Wainstein 2023), not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their families and the Latino community at large. Prioritizing group needs over individual needs is known as *familismo* and has been well documented in the literature (Martinez 2013). Students are very cognizant of family responsibilities such as taking care of siblings and contributing to the family financially or via language and/or cultural brokering (Gloria and Castellano 2012).

The whole family plays a central role in the postsecondary decision-making of Latino students (Flores et al. 2021; Kiyama 2011). In fact, Latino students often select colleges near their homes to benefit from family support (Martinez 2013; Nuñez and Crisp 2012) and community support during postsecondary transitions (Martinez 2013).

Latino students also prefer to attend postsecondary institutions that their friends are attending, which enhances their social capital (Acevedo-Gil 2017). They also favor schools with a higher number of Latino students, which is consistent with chain migration theory (Pérez and McDonough 2008).



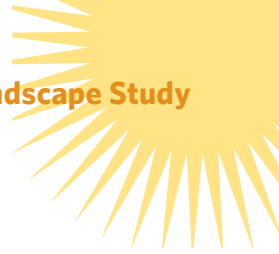
Latino students may also need to consider their families' immigration status in their college decision-making (Flores et al. 2021). Choosing a college close to home may be a compromise between pursuing an individualistic goal and being faithful to familial responsibilities (Flores et al. 2021).

A Texas study showed that Latino students were the second largest group of Texas high school graduates in 2008 and 2009. However, these Latino graduates applied to fewer schools than Whites and Asians (Black et al. 2020) and were more likely to “undermatch” (a phenomenon in American education in which well-qualified high-school graduates, often from less affluent households, do not apply to competitive colleges).

While systemic informational barriers affect Latino students' enrollment decisions, undermatch may also be produced by a desire to be closer to home, a need to prioritize family needs over their own, and the desire to attend institutions with a history of Latino enrollment and success.

As *Excelencia in Education* (2022) reported, 559 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) across the country enroll 66% of all Latino college students. An institution earns the HSI title if Latinos represent 25+% of their full-time student population. HSI institutions tend to be four-





year (59%), public (68%), in urban and suburban areas, and concentrated in some states more than others, including Illinois (Excelencia in Education 2022).

The role of families in the lives of Latino college students is complex. On one hand, language barriers may impede the flow of information between colleges and family members. These communication breakdowns may be compounded by other factors; family members may lack the social capital to help their children navigate the college landscape (Michel and Durdella 2019). On the other hand, families are extremely proud of their children and provide substantial social and emotional support, with mothers playing a particularly significant role in the college success of Latinos (Arámbula Turner 2021). The following quotes convey the value of this social and emotional support:

“I remember questioning whether I wanted to stick it out with [biology as a major] and I met my mom for a pollo asado and I was sobbing . . . but she was very calm and she provided the emotional support that eventually helped me finish my degree.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“There’s been tremendous support from not only my parents but extended family as well, especially uncles and aunts who have always checked up on me, given calls or just little things like send[ing] dinner when needed, just [to] help keep me motivated and help me stay on track.”

— LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT

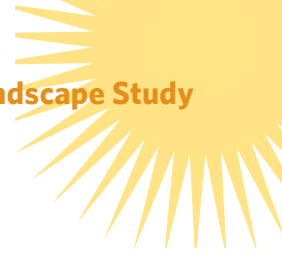
Yet Latino students reported that their parents often had a limited understanding of the college workload and expectations (Vasquez et al. 2015). They also reported that college outreach to their parents (particularly with regard to bilingual communications and resources) is lacking (Arámbula Turner 2021; Genthe and Harrington 2022; Michel and Durdella 2019; Saenz et al. 2018).

The Post-College Landscape

The challenges faced by Latino students as they prepare for and pursue a college degree do not end with bachelor’s degree attainment. In the college graduate focus group, graduates shared how they felt about preparing to enter the workforce or apply to graduate school.

“I didn’t know what it meant. I had done what they expected me to do (finish college), but I didn’t plan for after college. I wasn’t sure what applying to a [full-time] job looked like.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE



“I still needed time to figure out what my career would look like because it was exhausting just trying to make it through undergrad as a first-gen/low-income student.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“I had no clue how to advocate for decent pay after graduating college. Even with a science degree, I accepted a job in a lab making \$12/hour.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

“I think what helped me get into graduate school was working for close to four years in an academic setting where I found additional mentors [who] helped me see graduate school as a possibility. So that was what I relied on a lot.”

— LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATE

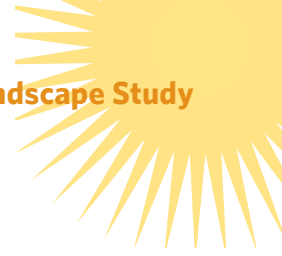
The experiences of these college graduates may explain why Latino college graduates have lower employment rates and earnings. Latino students who attained bachelor’s degrees in Spring 2020 were less likely to be employed, work full-time, or continue their education than their White, Asian, Native, and multiracial peers (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2021) (see Table 9).

TABLE 9

When education isn’t the “great equalizer”: Latinos with college degrees have lower employment rates and earnings—as well as lower postgraduate education rates—than their White, Asian, and multiracial peers.

Employment rates, mean starting salaries, and postgraduate enrollments of U.S. college graduates by race and ethnicity: 2020					
	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	ASIAN	TWO OR MORE RACES
% Employed	59.9%	50.9%	51.1%	55.2%	55.5%
% Full Time	54.4%	44.5%	43.9%	49.5%	48.3%
% Part Time	5.5%	6.4%	7.1%	5.7%	7.2%
% Continuing Ed	21.7%	22.3%	20.6%	23.3%	20.8%
Mean Starting Salary	\$57k	\$56k	\$56k	\$73k	\$58k

SOURCE: National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021

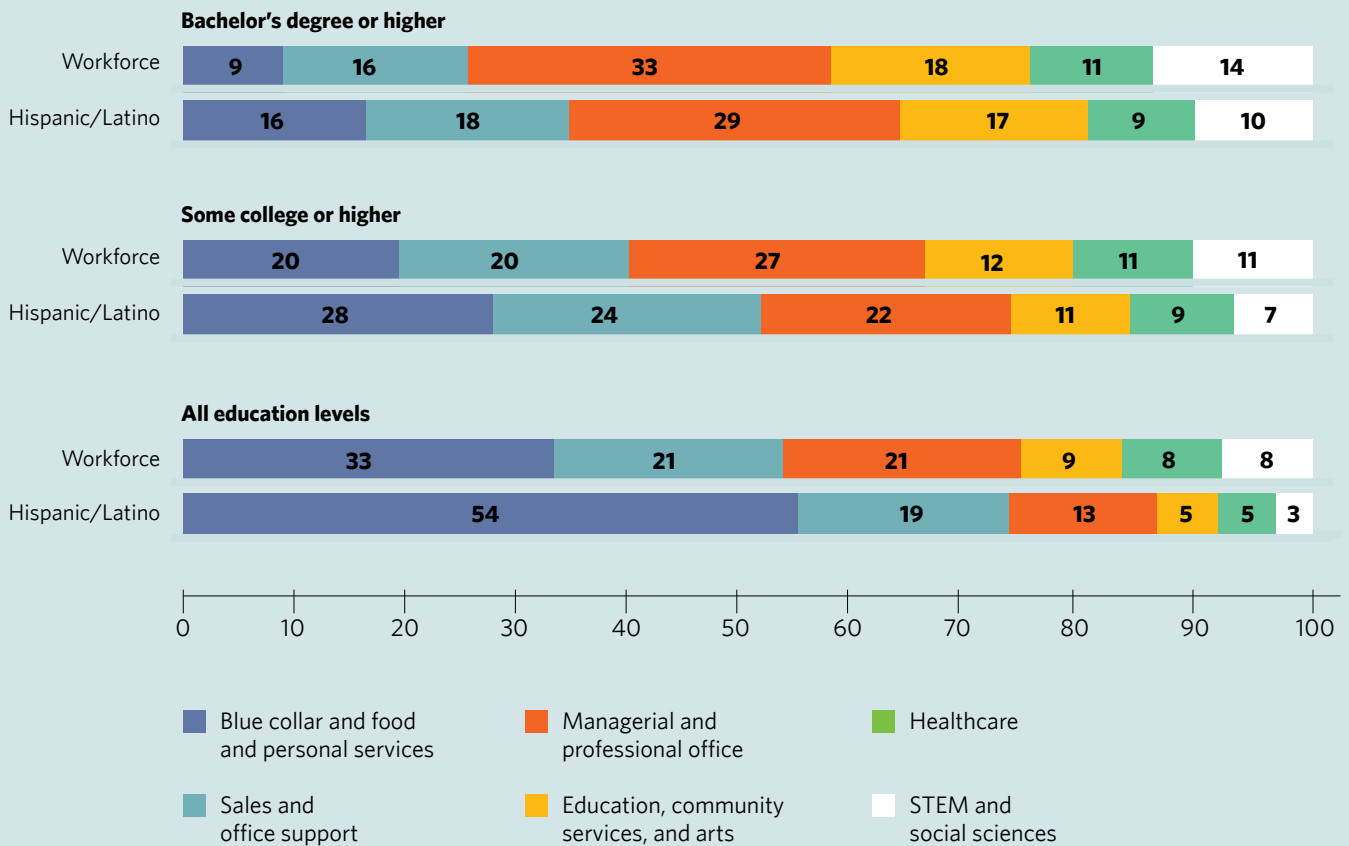


Some of these disparities may be explained by occupational choice or occupational segregation (which occurs when a demographic group is overrepresented or underrepresented in a certain job category). As Figure 17 illustrates, Latinos are more likely to work in blue-collar and food and personal services jobs than the general workforce at all education levels (Carnevale and Fasules 2017). However, these are not the only factors.

FIGURE 17

Educated and underemployed: Latinos with bachelor’s degrees or higher are less likely to work in STEM occupations and more likely to work in blue-collar occupations and food and personal services.

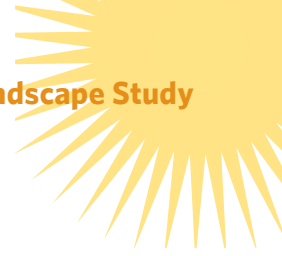
Occupations by demographic and education level: 2016



NOTE: Rows may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey*, 2016.

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *Latino Education and Economic Progress: Running Faster but Still Behind*, 2017



As seen in Table 10, disparities by gender, race, and ethnicity within the same degree group persist. For example, Latino men with architecture or engineering degrees had median annual earnings of \$66,100, compared to White men (\$91,600), White women (\$75,100), and Latina women (\$51,600) with the same degrees. Similar disparities exist in fields with lower earning potential, such as education and the arts (Carnevale and Fasules 2017).

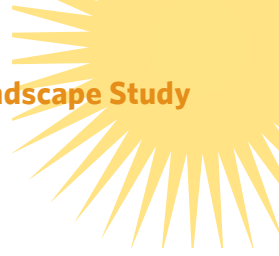
TABLE 10

U.S. wage inequities: Across all majors, Latinos—especially females—have lower median earnings.

Median annual earnings for terminal bachelor's degree holders by major group, gender, and race/ethnicity: 2011-15						
MAJOR GROUP	WHITE MEN	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN	HISPANIC/LATINO MEN	WHITE WOMEN	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN	HISPANIC/LATINA WOMEN
Architecture and engineering	\$91,600	\$67,100	\$66,100	\$75,100	\$66,100	\$51,600
Computers, statistics, and mathematics	\$85,100	\$66,100	\$65,100	\$70,700	\$55,100	\$51,600
Business	\$79,100	\$55,700	\$58,000	\$59,800	\$50,000	\$47,400
Health	\$77,400	\$59,800	\$61,900	\$63,200	\$61,100	\$55,100
Physical sciences	\$76,300	\$56,000	\$56,800	\$55,400	\$48,000	\$48,500
Social sciences	\$75,100	\$51,100	\$56,800	\$52,700	\$46,100	\$45,100
Biology and life sciences	\$66,100	\$50,100	\$54,400	\$51,600	\$46,500	\$46,500
Law and public policy	\$65,200	\$52,700	\$58,000	\$47,000	\$43,000	\$43,500
Communications and journalism	\$65,100	\$50,900	\$52,200	\$52,700	\$46,500	\$47,500
Agriculture and natural resources	\$63,200	\$46,500	\$51,600	\$46,500	\$46,500	\$43,400
Industrial arts, consumer services, and recreation	\$63,200	\$45,100	\$48,800	\$45,100	\$37,900	\$40,200
Psychology and social work	\$61,100	\$48,100	\$50,100	\$45,100	\$40,700	\$41,200
Humanities and liberal arts	\$59,900	\$45,800	\$50,600	\$49,300	\$44,800	\$45,700
Arts	\$55,900	\$42,200	\$47,400	\$45,700	\$41,300	\$43,000
Education	\$52,700	\$48,400	\$45,300	\$43,400	\$43,500	\$41,300

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2011–2015

SOURCE: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *Latino Education and Economic Progress: Running Faster but Still Behind*, 2017



Additional Considerations

IN ADDITION TO THESE SIX KEY FACTORS, the focus group participants, advisory committee members, and other stakeholders identified several other important considerations, which are covered in this section.

English Language Learners

English language learners (ELLs) are often not tracked by this designation in higher education. In a report issued by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Bergey et al. (2018) identified three types of ELLs with different learning needs:

- 1 **Generation 1.5 students who were born in another country and relocated to the U.S. during their high school years**
- 2 **International students who traveled to the U.S. to attend college**
- 3 **Recent immigrants who arrived as adults**

In 2016, 30% of the recent immigrant adults had bachelor's or advanced degrees from their home countries (Krogstad and Radford 2018) and others had less than a high school education. Students with different educational backgrounds will require different supports. As Bergey et al. (2018) stated:

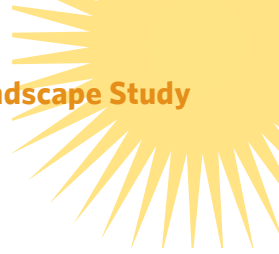
“Even though many colleges and universities have programs and centers to support English-language acquisition, there is still more work to be done to ensure that ELLs are appropriately assessed, placed, and instructed such that their distinct and diverse needs are met.”

— *Serving English Language Learners in Higher Education: Unlocking the Potential*, American Institutes for Research (Bergey et al. 2018, 15)

The AIR report's authors recommended the use of technology to assess students on multiple measures, track outcomes, and provide more targeted instruction that better meets student needs (Bergey et al. 2018).

Undocumented Students

Undocumented Latino students are an important demographic to follow, monitor, and support. Illinois is home to the fifth-largest population of undocumented students pursuing postsecondary degrees in the nation. According to a report issued by the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and New American Economy (2021), fewer than half of the 17,757 undocumented Illinois college students are DACA-eligible (see Table 11 on page 62). The report's authors noted the following:



“In their pursuit of higher education, undocumented students actively ready themselves to fill critical skills shortages—including in healthcare, STEM fields, teaching, and business—and become better positioned to support their families, communities, and our regional and national economies.”

— *Undocumented Students in Higher Education: How Many Students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They?* (Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and New American Economy 2021, 1)

More than 4,000 undocumented students graduate from Illinois high schools each year (Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and New American Economy 2021), so the number of undocumented students seeking knowledge and a better life on our state’s college campuses could continue to rise. These undocumented students need to know that their investment in higher education will pay off in tangible ways, such as increased earning power and the opportunity to pursue their chosen careers. Yet their future employment prospects remain as uncertain as their immigration status.

To make matters worse, some college majors require students to work in their fields of specialization while they complete their degrees. Undocumented students who are not DACA-eligible cannot fulfill this requirement because they do not have legal authorization to work in the U.S. Therefore, they must either avoid these majors in the first place or switch majors after investing valuable time and financial resources into a major with a work requirement.

These barriers to college and career success underscore the urgent need to ensure that undocumented students have the opportunity to complete their degrees—and to enter the workforce and earn a living wage. More should be done to support these Illinois residents, who are studying hard and making personal sacrifices to earn college degrees, but still face limited opportunities and insurmountable barriers.



Most undocumented students in college do not have DACA status.



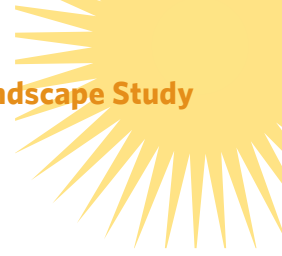


TABLE 11

Educated but undocumented: Nearly 18,000 college students in Illinois are undocumented—and more than half of these undocumented students do not have Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) status.

Illinois higher education population by generation and immigration status: 2019	
UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION	17,757
DACA-Eligible Students in Higher Education	8,784
Non-DACA-Eligible Students in Higher Education	8,973

SOURCE: Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and New American Economy, 2021

Social and Emotional Well-Being

In our focus groups, Latino college students reported experiencing stress, anxiety, self-doubt, and imposter syndrome—emotional states that adversely affected their social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social-emotional well-being became a topic of national concern. Yet the need for more mental health services had already been growing on America’s college campuses for some time (Abrams 2023). Many students experienced mental health challenges, along with other stressors such as housing and food insecurity. In 2021, 36% of college students in the U.S. were food insecure, 31% had received mental health services within the last 12 months, and 73% had experienced moderate or serious psychological distress (American College Health Association 2022).

The American Psychological Association reported an increased demand for mental health services on college campuses—a demand that far exceeded the capacity of college mental health centers. This was likely due to a decrease in stigma and an increase in the number of students who had accessed mental health services prior to their college years.

A full-time college counselor carries an average caseload of 120 students. But, at some centers, average caseloads exceed 300 students (Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2022).

Colleges have turned to group therapy, peer counseling, and telehealth to meet this need. Some colleges have trained faculty and staff to identify students in distress and refer them



to the appropriate services. Some college mental health centers conduct immediate intake assessments and then develop a stepped-up care model that delivers more intensive services to students with higher needs (Abrams 2023).

More colleges are taking steps to develop a campus-wide culture of wellness (Abrams 2023). This proactive, preventive step will be a critically important one for Latino students, who often suffer in silence because mental illness is a stigmatized topic in Latin American culture. Many Latinos fear that seeking out mental health services will create embarrassment and shame for their families (Mental Health America n.d.). ✨



Conclusion

For many Latinos, higher education represents a new frontier—a brave new world that is at once exhilarating and intimidating. However, the road to, through, and beyond college can be a difficult one to navigate, particularly for Latinos who are the first in their families to pursue a postsecondary degree. Collectively, we should do more to support Latinos on their college journeys so that they can reap the many benefits of a college education, realize their full potential, and share their gifts and talents with the world.

This report points to specific areas that should be addressed to increase Latino college access and completion rates. While there is substantial work to be done, Illinois has already laid a strong foundation for this work by implementing a series of policies designed to better support Latino students in the P-12 system and higher education.

Policy advocates, legislators, policymakers, and educational leaders have pushed hard for these changes—with encouraging results. Latino high school graduation and college enrollment rates are rising steadily in Illinois, which suggests that our continued investments in educational equity will be life-changing for Latinos—our state’s fastest growing population—while strengthening our workforce and the Illinois economy. ✨



About the Latino Policy Forum

The mission of the Latino Policy Forum is to build the power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well-being of our community and society. The Forum furthers policy and practice in four areas: immigration, leadership, housing, and education. This work focuses on promoting just immigration, strengthening leadership, advocating for affordable housing, and improving education outcomes from preschool to college.

www.latinopolicyforum.org





Notes

1. "Students were classified as full-time if they were taking at least 12 hours of classes during an average school week and as part-time if they were taking fewer hours. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Data are based on sample surveys of the civilian noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons in the military and persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities). Includes students ages 16 through 64."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2020. See Digest of Education Statistics 2021, table 503.40. (NCES 2022a)

2. Lumina Foundation and IWERC have slightly different attainment rates. This difference may be due to the different dates that the census data was accessed.
3. "DACA was originally established via executive action in June 2012 to protect certain undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children from removal proceedings and receive authorization to work for renewable two-year periods. To be eligible, individuals must have arrived in the U.S. prior to turning 16 and before June 15, 2007; be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 (i.e., under age 41 as of 2022); be currently enrolled in school, have completed high school or its equivalent or be a veteran; and have no lawful status as of June 15, 2012." (KFF 2023)



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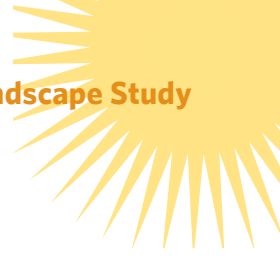
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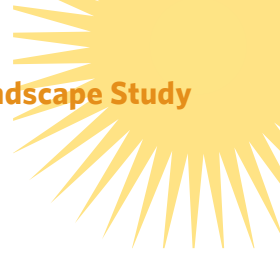
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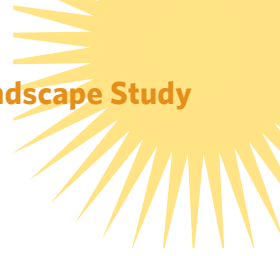
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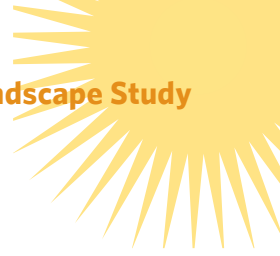
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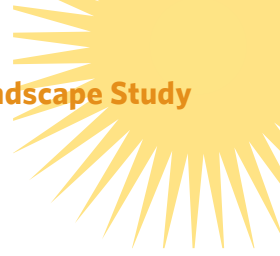
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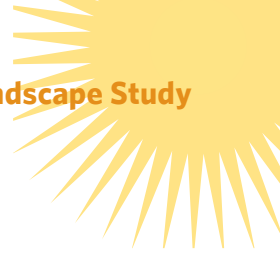
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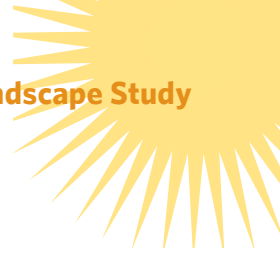
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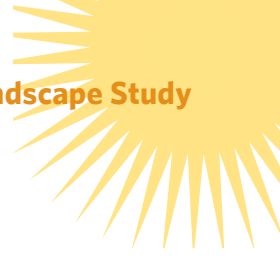
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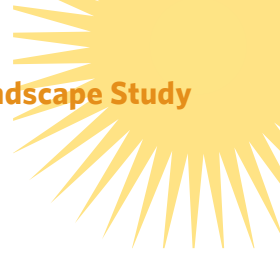
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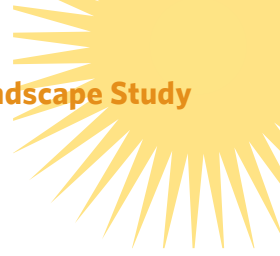
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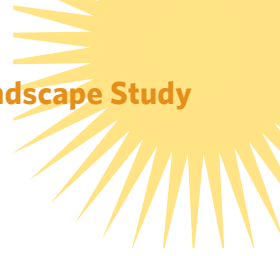
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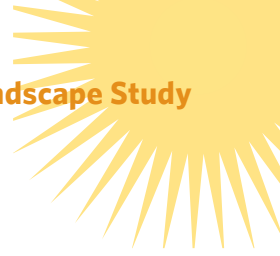
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