Latinos are an important part of California’s cultural fabric and are central to the state’s future economic prosperity. Critical to this prosperity is how California’s K-12 public schools prepare Latino students for success in college, career, and civic life. This fact sheet summarizes key student characteristic and achievement data as part of an effort to highlight the opportunities and challenges facing Latino students. Additional CSBA briefs offer information about research-supported strategies and recommendations for board members to promote Latino student achievement.

Enrollment

Of the 6.2 million K-12 students who attend California public schools, just over half—3,376,591 million (54 percent)—are Latino. This student population has grown steadily and has constituted the majority of public school students since the 2009–10 school year.

While Latino students attend school in all of California’s 58 counties, their numbers vary considerably, ranging from 5 percent of students in Alpine County to 92 percent of students in Imperial County. In 22 counties, the majority of students are Latino, while fewer than one-fourth are Latino in 17 counties.

The concentration of Latino students also varies considerably at the school district level. Nearly 40 percent of school districts have a majority Latino student population—and in half of these, 75 percent or more of students are Latino. The largest of these high-concentration Latino school districts (those with 75 percent or more Latino students) is the Santa Ana Unified School District, which enrolls 49,372 students, 93 percent of whom are Latino. To put this in perspective, most high-concentration Latino school districts enroll fewer than 3,000 students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Latino Enrollment</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent Latino</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Latino Enrollment</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>34,800</td>
<td>37,716</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>24,413</td>
<td>63,481</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>61,593</td>
<td>77,954</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>104,429</td>
<td>272,132</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulare</td>
<td>80,655</td>
<td>104,049</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>35,771</td>
<td>95,155</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colusa</td>
<td>3,569</td>
<td>4,627</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Sutter</td>
<td>8,735</td>
<td>23,690</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>8,341</td>
<td>11,253</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>Yuba</td>
<td>5,396</td>
<td>14,619</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madera</td>
<td>23,414</td>
<td>31,728</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>3,459</td>
<td>9,549</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced</td>
<td>42,906</td>
<td>58,812</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>63,229</td>
<td>178,060</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>20,285</td>
<td>29,203</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>77,425</td>
<td>228,356</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>48,344</td>
<td>69,752</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Modoc</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>1,411</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>132,755</td>
<td>204,418</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>18,983</td>
<td>60,898</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td>123,343</td>
<td>189,949</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>76,566</td>
<td>245,906</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>969,055</td>
<td>1,492,652</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>10,005</td>
<td>33,741</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
<td>261,777</td>
<td>403,137</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Butte</td>
<td>7,595</td>
<td>31,760</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>273,491</td>
<td>428,992</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Del Norte</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>4,228</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislaus</td>
<td>66,227</td>
<td>109,990</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Amador</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>4,147</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventura</td>
<td>81,099</td>
<td>137,758</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>5,789</td>
<td>27,875</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn</td>
<td>3,234</td>
<td>5,581</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>Calaveras</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>5,461</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>22,580</td>
<td>40,393</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Placer</td>
<td>14,471</td>
<td>74,063</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>11,320</td>
<td>20,402</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Mariposa</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1,865</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Joaquin</td>
<td>78,002</td>
<td>148,948</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>11,424</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mono</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Humboldt</td>
<td>3,369</td>
<td>18,501</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inyo</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>4,497</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Lassen</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>3,791</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>238,661</td>
<td>485,835</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>Tuolumne</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>6,076</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>244,753</td>
<td>508,169</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Siskiyou</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>5,934</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolo</td>
<td>14,242</td>
<td>30,067</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>Plumas</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>2,169</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>32,086</td>
<td>70,449</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>Shasta</td>
<td>4,093</td>
<td>26,935</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendocino</td>
<td>5,672</td>
<td>13,203</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehama</td>
<td>4,421</td>
<td>10,958</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>1,584</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Obispo</td>
<td>13,833</td>
<td>34,733</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Alpine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Student Characteristics**

When looking at specific characteristics of Latino students, there are multiple factors that contribute to their educational attainment. Understanding these characteristics in their counties, districts, and schools can help board members better meet the needs of Latino students. All data in this section are from the 2017–18 school year.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Latino students are the most socioeconomically disadvantaged student group in California—80 percent of Latino students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, compared to 31 percent of white students and 75 percent of African American students.6 Socioeconomically disadvantaged students are those for whom neither of their parents received a high school diploma or those who are eligible for the free and reduced-price meals program.

Latinos are more highly concentrated in high-poverty schools than any other student group. These high-poverty schools have less access to resources that create educational opportunity including the most experienced teachers, modern facilities, libraries, and other key resources. Over half (57 percent) of Latino students attend schools where at least 75 percent of students are eligible for the free and reduced-price meals program, which is the most common barometer for measuring poverty among student groups.7

**Language Status**

Most Latino students come from households where a language other than English is spoken at home. This can be an advantage as bilingualism is an asset that will benefit them in college, career, and life. However, many Latino students are not proficient in English, which affects their academic achievement.

Nearly one in three (31 percent) Latino students are English learners, defined as students whose native language is not English and who need instructional supports to fully access the regular classroom program. The proportion of Latino students who are English learners drops as they move up the grade levels—48 percent of first-grade Latino students are English learners, compared to 29 percent by sixth grade and 19 percent by ninth grade.9 Addressing the learning needs of these older English learners as well as ensuring that those who have been reclassified continue to achieve requires ongoing attention and expertise. For more resources from CSBA about English learners, visit bit.ly/2Mg36ku.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities have learning or physical differences that may range from minor to severe. Schools provide a vital service by ensuring that all students have the opportunity to meet challenging objectives. In fact, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to identify all students in their jurisdiction who have a disability, and ensure the provision of “resources, adapted instruction, and specialized assistance to mitigate the effects of [their] disability.”10

A similar proportion of Latino students are identified as students with disabilities as white students—12 percent of Latinos compared to 11 percent of their white peers. By comparison, 17 percent of African American and 15 percent of Native American students are identified.11

**Homeless Students**

Homeless students are “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”12 Of the state’s 204,085 homeless students, 73 percent are Latino (149,115). Latino students, along with their African American and Native American peers, are over three times more likely to be homeless than white and Asian students.13 Such students are more likely to repeat a grade, score lower on both math and language arts assessments, have a higher number of suspensions and expulsions, and drop out of school.14
Migrant Students

While migrant students make up less than one percent of the overall student population, nearly all the state’s 48,636 migrant students are Latino (98 percent). Migrant students require extra support to ensure their continuity of education. As they move from one residence to another due to economic necessity, they often change their attendance zone within a district, move to another district, or even to another state.

Foster Youth

Of the state’s 34,426 foster youth, 54 percent are Latino (18,592)—comparable to the group’s proportion of the overall student population. Students in foster care face many challenging circumstances. For example, almost half of students in foster care changed school midyear in their first year of foster care and 34 percent of 17- and 18-year-olds in foster care had attended five or more schools. For more resources from CSBA about foster youth, visit bit.ly/2NsnYp4.

Academic Achievement

According to the 2017–18 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) results in math and English language arts, a significant achievement gap persists between Latino students and their white and Asian peers across all tested grades. For example, among sixth grade students that met or exceeded standards in math, there is a 28 percentage-point gap between Latino students and their white peers, and a 47 percentage-point gap between Latino students and their Asian peers.

Among sixth grade students that met or exceeded standards in English language arts, there is a 26 percentage-point gap between Latino students and their white peers, and a 39 percentage-point gap between Latino students and their Asian peers.

Moreover, 11th-grade results suggest that only 19 percent of Latino students are ready or conditionally ready for college-level math coursework, compared to 44 percent of white and 69 percent of Asian students. In English language arts, 47 percent of Latino students are ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, compared to 69 percent of white and 79 percent of Asian students. While the California State University and many community colleges have been using 11th-grade math and English language arts standardized test scores to indicate college readiness for a number of years, 11th-grade CAASPP scores have only been included in the college and career readiness index as part of the state accountability system since the 2016–17 school year.
High School Graduation Rates

According to 2016–17 four-year cohort graduation data (the most recent available), 80 percent of Latino students graduated from high school, compared to 87 percent of white students and 93 percent of Asian students. Despite these gaps, cohort graduation rates have improved for all students since the 2009–10 school year, with the gap closing slightly between Latino students and their white and Asian peers.

However, despite the progress in high school graduation rates, only 39 percent of Latino students that graduate from high school do so having completed the courses required for entrance to a University of California or California State University campus—compared to 52 percent of white students and 74 percent of Asian students.

Questions for Board Members to Consider

As important decision-makers in their districts and counties, board members have the responsibility to ask questions and think strategically about closing achievement gaps for all students. While this brief has focused on state-level statistics, the challenges for individual districts and counties will be different depending on their demographics, geography, history, and local community needs. Seeking answers to the following questions can help board members better understand their local context:

1. What are the student demographics in my district or county and how do they compare to the demographics of individual schools?

2. Within individual schools, do Latino students have access to and enroll in rigorous coursework? What supports are provided to help Latino students succeed in these rigorous courses?

3. What is the achievement of Latino students across the district or county and within individual schools? What is the achievement gap countywide, district-wide, and in each school?

4. What additional supports are available for students in poverty provided by the county office of education, the district, or through other organizations? Are there additional partnerships that can be leveraged to enhance supports?

5. Is the school environment relevant to all students based on their backgrounds and cultures? Does the course content relate to the experiences and backgrounds of Latino students (for example, does the history curriculum highlight the achievements of Latinos)?
6. Is the district or county staff equipped to relate to students’ experiences and background? Does the teaching and administrative staff reflect the diversity of the student population?

Conclusion

The information in this fact sheet is an overview of statewide results for Latino students. However, a more detailed analysis of data from each county, district, and school can help board members and other education leaders make more informed decisions about how to best serve this student population. As part of CSBA’s continued efforts to shed light on California’s diverse students, we will continue to produce additional briefs, fact sheets, and articles to highlight research-supported strategies and recommendations for board members to consider.

Resources

Sample policies and administrative regulations are available to subscribers of CSBA’s policy services through GAMUT Online at bit.ly/2jM5Ntz. These include:

» BP 0415 – Equity
» BP/AR 0460 – Local Control and Accountability Plan
» BP/AR 3553 – Free and Reduced Price Meals
» BP/AR 6146.1 – High School Graduation Requirements
» BP/AR 6164.4 – Identification and Evaluation of Individuals for Special Education
» BP/AR 6173 – Education for Homeless Children
» BP/AR 6173.1 – Education for Foster Youth
» BP/AR 6174 – Education for English Learners
» BP/AR 6175 – Migrant Education Program

Endnotes


2 See endnote 1.

3 See endnote 1.


5 See endnote 1.

6 See endnote 1.


8 See endnote 7.


11 See endnote 1.

12 California Department of Education. Definition of homeless children and youths. Available at bit.ly/2PQkdGL.

13 See endnote 1.


15 See endnote 1.

16 California Department of Education. Overview of migrant education in California. Available at bit.ly/2PQTdX.

17 See endnote 1.


20 See endnote 19.

21 See endnote 19.
