

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational Achievement and the Successful Integration of Latinos in Nebraska: A Statistical Profile to Inform Policies and Programs

At the heart of any successful integration model lies continuous interaction and mutual adjustment and accommodations. A model grounded on equity and mutuality, and a more organic rather than forced paced of assimilation, holds the most promise (Demetrious G. Papademetriou, 2003).

The unprecedented and continuous growth of the Latino population compels us to engage in institutional changes, comprehensive policy reforms, and innovative programs that enhance the productive integration of this population into our state. As an abundant body of research and informed practices make clear, education is the bedrock of successful integration for current and future generations of Latinos. No longer can a job, obtained without a high school or college education, provide the opportunities it may have once provided to older generations of Americans or, for that matter, first generation immigrants. The latter tend to measure their socioeconomic success relative to conditions of unemployment and below-poverty wages they may have left behind. Their children's socioeconomic mobility will hinge on educational attainment in this country.

This report has been prepared by the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS) at the request of the Nebraska Mexican American Commission (MAC). It is, in part, an update of earlier reports prepared for the commission by the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Its main contribution is to serve as a resource for program managers and policy makers in their formulation of policies and innovative programs aimed at addressing the recalcitrant educational gap affecting the Latino population. The report utilizes a combination of census and educational data. Our analysis is grounded in current sociological and educational research.

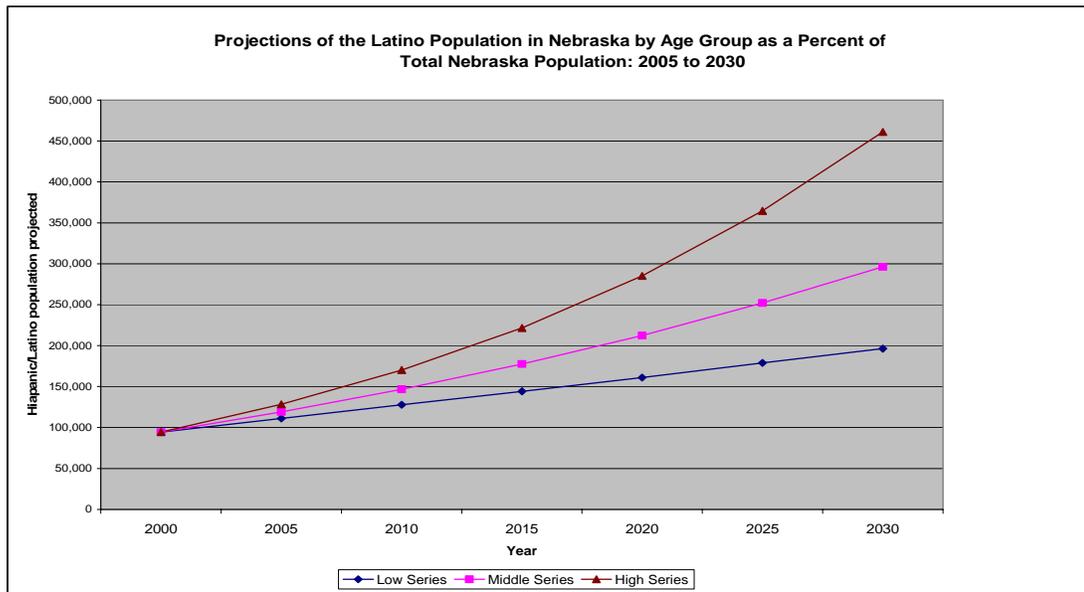
Dramatic Latino population growth and complex diversity will shape the future of the state.

1. Nebraska can be designated as a new and resurgent Latino immigrant destination. Latinos make up the bulk of new arrivals in the state, with exponential growth taking place during the 1990s. As communities around the state experienced serious loss of population in the aftermath of the farm crisis, Latino newcomers breathed new life into them.

| Percentage Change in White Alone, not Hispanic/Latino, and Hispanic/Latino Populations in Selected Nebraska Cities, 1990–2000 | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|---|--|
| City | White alone, not Hispanic/Latino | | Hispanic/Latino | | Percent Change in White Alone, not Hispanic/Latino Population in 2000 (based in 1990) | Percent Change in Hispanic/Latino Population in 2000 (based in 1990) |
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | | |
| Omaha | 276,218 | 293,876 | 10,288 | 29,397 | 6% | 186% |
| Bellevue | 26,968 | 36,916 | 1,213 | 2,609 | 37% | 115% |
| Columbus | 19,171 | 19,209 | 167 | 1,395 | 0% | 735% |
| Fremont | 23,261 | 23,570 | 165 | 1,085 | 1% | 558% |
| Grand Island | 36,732 | 34,960 | 1,887 | 6,845 | -5% | 263% |
| Hastings | 22,192 | 21,790 | 268 | 1,343 | -2% | 401% |
| Kearney | 23,415 | 25,525 | 667 | 1,118 | 9% | 68% |
| Lexington | 6,231 | 4,635 | 329 | 5,121 | -26% | 1457% |
| Lincoln | 179,302 | 198,087 | 3,764 | 8,154 | 10% | 117% |
| Norfolk | 20,748 | 20,834 | 299 | 1,790 | 0% | 499% |
| North Platte | 20,994 | 21,725 | 1,355 | 1,596 | 3% | 18% |
| Schuyler | 3,873 | 2,893 | 164 | 2,423 | -25% | 1377% |
| Scottsbluff | 10,460 | 10,548 | 2,720 | 3,476 | 1% | 28% |
| South Sioux City | 8,704 | 8,074 | 545 | 2,958 | -7% | 443% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 Summary Tape File 1 (STF 1) and Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1).

2. The highest population projections noted in this report suggest that the Nebraska Latino population may reach 450,000 by 2030. Mid-level projections for the same year, which we believe to be too conservative, estimate the Latino population will reach nearly 300,000.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) and projections made by Nebraska State Data Center, Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

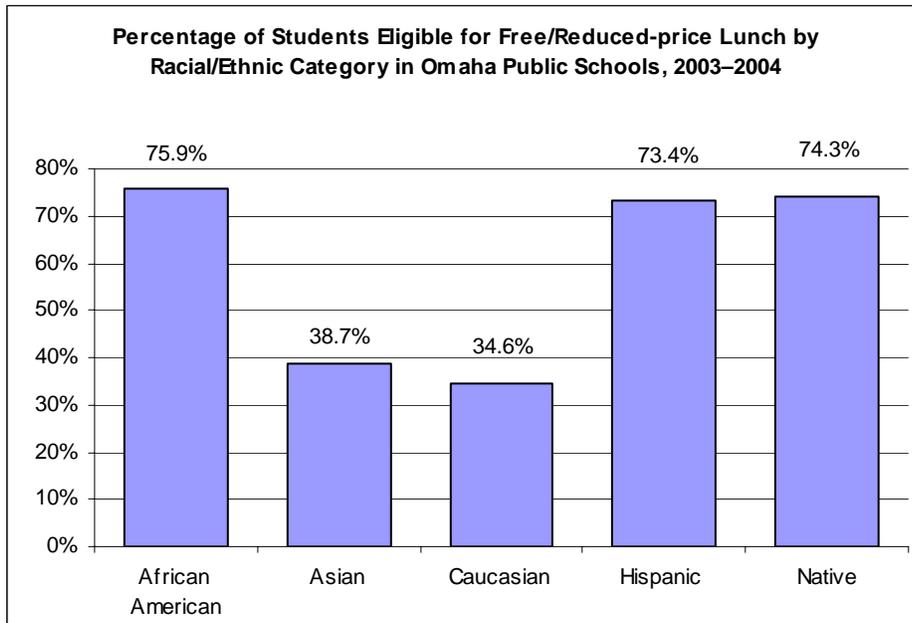
3. According to the more conservative estimates cited above, by 2030 Latino children under age five will comprise nearly a quarter of Nebraska children (22.3%), and Latinos as a whole will make up over 15% of the Nebraska population. With regard to new immigration, research shows it is the second generation that will leave its indelible mark on the social, economic, and political landscape of the state.

4. Most Latinos in Nebraska (76%) trace origins to Mexico, but there are growing numbers of Caribbean, Central, and South Americans creating great diversity and new challenges in the formulation and management of integration policies and programs.

Poor Families, Poor Schools, and Poor Immigration Laws Negatively Affect Educational Outcomes.

1. Latinos experience high rates of poverty despite very high rates of labor force participation. Many Latino parents suffer from low educational attainment and labor in low-wage occupations. Research shows that parental socioeconomic status (a combination of education, occupation and home ownership) is a strong predictor of children’s school achievement.

2. Latino children suffering from high levels of poverty are likely to attend classes with health and personal problems that affect learning. In 2003–2004, 73.4% of Hispanic students in the Omaha Public School District (OPS) qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. From our conversations with teachers, we learned this figure may underestimate the real need as many parents are embarrassed to request this service.



Source: Omaha Public Schools, Research Division, “Omaha Public Schools, 1994–1995 and 2003–2004 Percentage of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-price Lunch (by Racial/Ethnic Category), Chart I.”

3. Immigrant and Latino parents have very high aspirations for their children. However, the resources to meet such aspirations are frequently lacking. School funding is often inadequate to provide for programs such as early education, dual language, or summer classes, which contribute to higher educational attainment.

4. There is a high concentration of English language learners (ELLs) in a selective number of Nebraska school districts, and 39% of Spanish-speaking limited English Proficiency (LEP) children in the state are enrolled in OPS. However, a large proportion of ELL students (more than 25%) are enrolled in small town school districts such as Lexington and Schuyler. These schools are often less equipped than urban schools to deploy the institutional resources and provide the staff training necessary to comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Civil Rights Commission standards regarding access to a quality education for all students.

The Persistent Latino Educational Gap and Contributing Factors: From Early Years to Higher Education

1. A high proportion of Latino children (14%) in Nebraska are of preschool age, yet a relatively small number of such children participate in preschool programs. Research has consistently shown that early education programs have lasting positive effects on educational attainment (National Association for the Education of Young Children 1997). However, the state does not provide funding for preschool programs. There also is a serious lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate staff as well as a dearth of the kind of data needed to formulate informed programs and policies (Interview with Head Start staff July 7, 2004).

2. Enrollments for Latino students in Nebraska public schools have increased dramatically, a function of population increase. Between 1996 and 2002 increases were greater than 62% at all grade levels. In 2003 to 2004, 9.3% of students in Nebraska public schools were Latinos, while Latino certified staff in schools was only 1.1%. Research has shown that Latinos do better in educational settings where Latino faculty and staff, as well as student co-ethnics, are visibly present.

3. In Nebraska, fewer than half of Latinos 25 years and over have completed High School, while almost 90% of non-Hispanic Whites have done so. In 2003 only 57.8% of Latino students completed high school, a rate lower than every other race/ethnic group except Native American students. Rates also vary, sometimes significantly by school district. A variety of factors interact to affect these rates. School context, for example, may account for lower graduation rates in schools with a smaller presence of co-ethnics or a history of a hostile learning environment. In other school districts the lure of better labor market opportunities, as may be the case in Omaha or Lincoln, can also influence the rate. Much research needs to be done before we understand the causes of differential graduation and dropout rates across localities and districts.

4. In 1990–1991, Latinos accounted for 6% of total dropouts in grades 7–12 in the state. By 2002–2003, Latinos made up 19% of total school dropouts in these grades. Although the absolute number of Latinos who dropped out of school decreased when

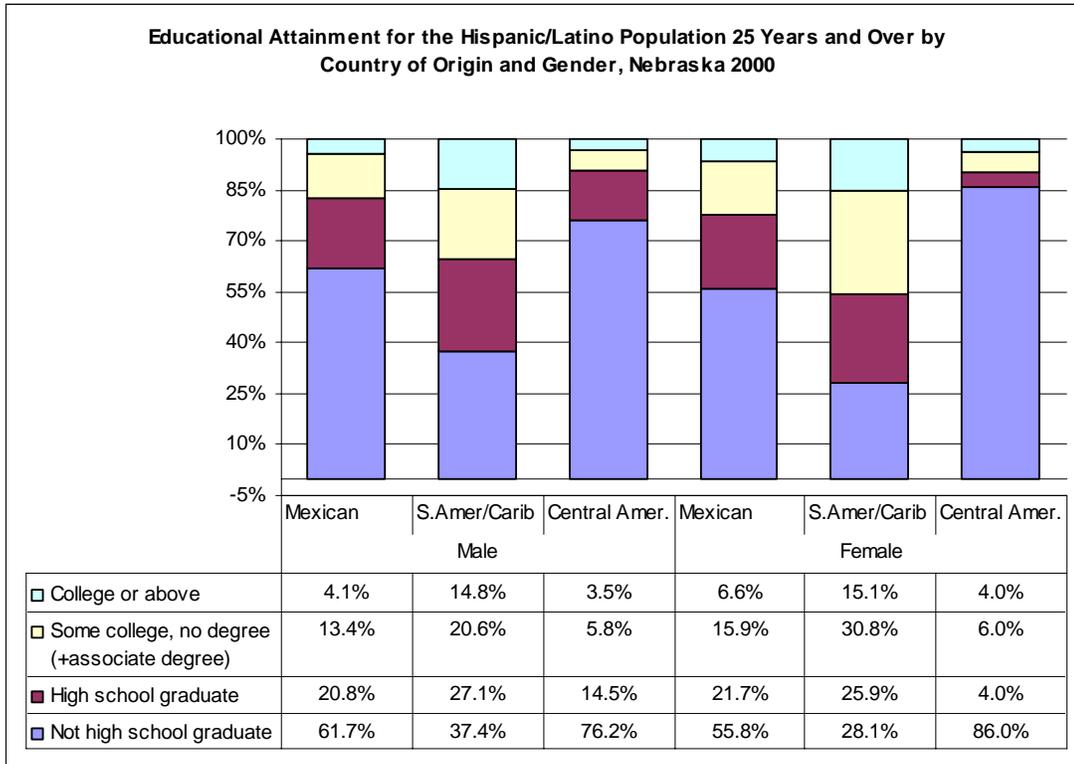
compared to the previous year, Latinos made up an even higher percentage of total dropouts. Viewed differently, 12.2% of Latinos, grades 9–12, dropped out of school in 2001–2002. The Nebraska rate is the highest among Great Plain states. Statewide in 2002, Latino students accounted for 15.5% of Nebraska dropouts from grades 7 through 12, but totaled less than 6% of the student population in those grades.

| Dropout Rates for Grades 9–12, by Race/Ethnicity in Selected Great Plains States, School Year 2000–2001 | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Total | American Indian/Alaska Native | Hispanic | Asian/Pacific Islander | Black, non Hispanic | White, non Hispanic |
| Nebraska | 4.00 | 13.90 | 12.20 | 3.80 | 10.90 | 2.90 |
| Iowa | 2.70 | 10.40 | 9.10 | 2.30 | 7.30 | 2.30 |
| Kansas | 3.20 | 5.60 | 7.60 | 2.10 | 5.40 | 2.60 |
| Missouri | 4.20 | 5.40 | 7.40 | 2.60 | 6.20 | 3.90 |
| South Dakota | 3.90 | 20.60 | 8.70 | 3.90 | 6.30 | 2.60 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, School year 2000-2001.

5. We found that national and state data sources on dropout and graduation rates are incomplete, often unavailable and seemingly contradictory. Nebraska, not unlike every other state in the nation, cannot tell with precision how many students drop out, what percentage are Latinos, and whether rates have changed significantly over time and for different generations.

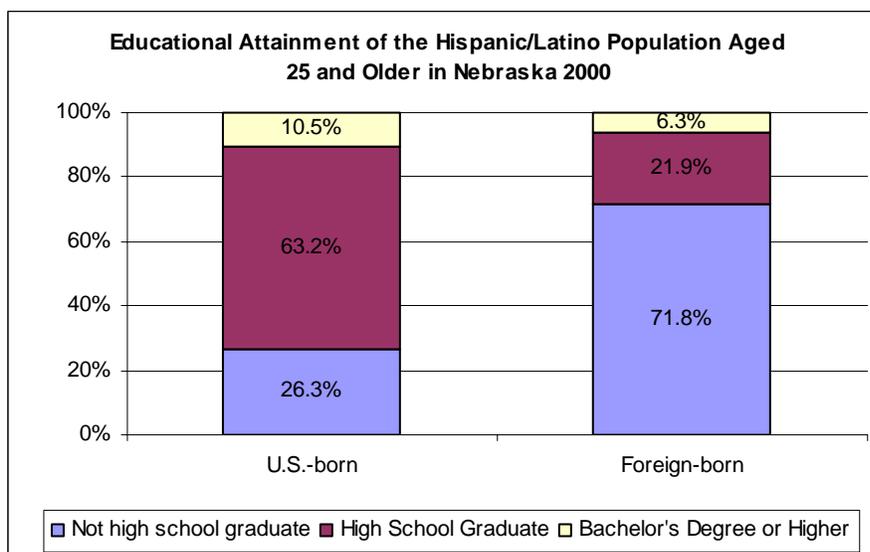
6. The educational gap is affected by factors such as immigration histories, gender, and the treatment of different Latino groups by the larger society. Among Latinos, those groups who experience higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and discrimination, as is the case with Mexicans and Central Americans, also experience lower levels of education. Educational attainment for men and women also varies by nationality in complex ways.



U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), Nebraska. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: S. Amer.= South America; Central Amer.= Central America; Carib=Caribbean.

7. An educational gap exists not only between Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites, but also between U.S.-born and foreign-born Latinos. Statewide, in 2000, 26.3% of U.S.-born Latinos age 25 and older had less than a high school education, while 71.8% of foreign-born Latinos fell into this category.



U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), Nebraska. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau.

8. Latinos made up 8% of the state's college-age population in 2000, but only 2.4% of students enrolled in higher education were Hispanic. Hispanic students accounted for only 1.8% of degree completions in 2000–2001. Viewed differently only 20% of Hispanics in the prime college attendance age (18-24) are attending Nebraska colleges and universities, compared to 65% of Whites. Of the 2,743 Latino students in college in Nebraska in 2001, only 14% are at UNO; percentages for the other NU campuses are even smaller.

9. Hispanic faculty comprised only 2.1% of all full-time faculty in higher education in the state.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report represents a very small contribution to the knowledge and information that must be produced, disseminated, and acted-upon if we are to meet the challenges of Latino integration with informed approaches. The small set of recommendations offered below should be treated as ideas to begin or continue a serious dialogue, as opposed to definitive statements, about what needs to be done in Nebraska regarding the integration of Latinos into our educational institutions.

1. One of the many problems with the data sources tapped for this report is a lack of the year-to-year comparability necessary to obtain a true picture of Latino educational attainment. Nebraska must secure the necessary resources for the appropriate institutions to implement an accountability system based on the longitudinal tracking of all students. The data must be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, immigrant generation, nationality, socio-economic status, gender and LEP level. Such a system will increase our awareness of the challenges that confront Latino educational attainment and our capability to manage such challenges. We also propose a centralized clearinghouse, supported by state and private funding, that compiles such data as well as information about best practices and programs throughout the state.
2. Regardless of how they are measured, educational attainment gaps between Latinos and other groups remain unacceptably high. The state should engage multiple stakeholders in an effort to formulate an explicit Latino and immigrant integration policy and design concrete programs that place educational attainment at the center.
3. Early education is known to pay off in later years. The state should provide adequate funding for early education programs.
4. State funding formulas should ensure that schools educating large numbers of newcomers and LEP children have the resources to provide equal educational opportunities for all students.

5. NCLB places a huge burden on schools to accomplish the worthy goal of closing the educational gap between Latinos and Whites. However, as research makes clear, neither schools nor poor Latino communities can accomplish this task alone. Compensatory programs must be put in place to allow schools, as well as Latino families and community institutions, to develop the know-how and resources necessary to accomplish these ends. Nebraska should join with other heartland states in conducting systematic evaluations of the No Child Left Behind Act's impact on Latino native and foreign-born students.
6. Currently, Nebraska school districts utilize a plethora of English language learning models. Research and experience reveal important differences in the performance of these various models. There is no system in place to evaluate or report on the impact of these programs on Latino children's educational success. We recommend the development of such a system.
7. Educational institutions at all levels must adopt novel initiatives to increase the presence of linguistically and culturally competent staff and faculty at every level. The small proportion of such faculty and staff in our institutions weighs heavily on our capacity to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.
8. Finally, immigration policies intersect with other national and state policies and this is especially true for education. Immigration policies that erect barriers to the successful integration of Latino children hinder the states' capacity to safeguard its future and must be reformed. Recent efforts by state legislators and the NU Board of Regents to support in-state tuition for undocumented children are a step in the right direction.