



LATINO POLICY & ISSUES BRIEF

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LEAKS IN THE CHICANA AND CHICANO EDUCATIONAL PIPELINE

by

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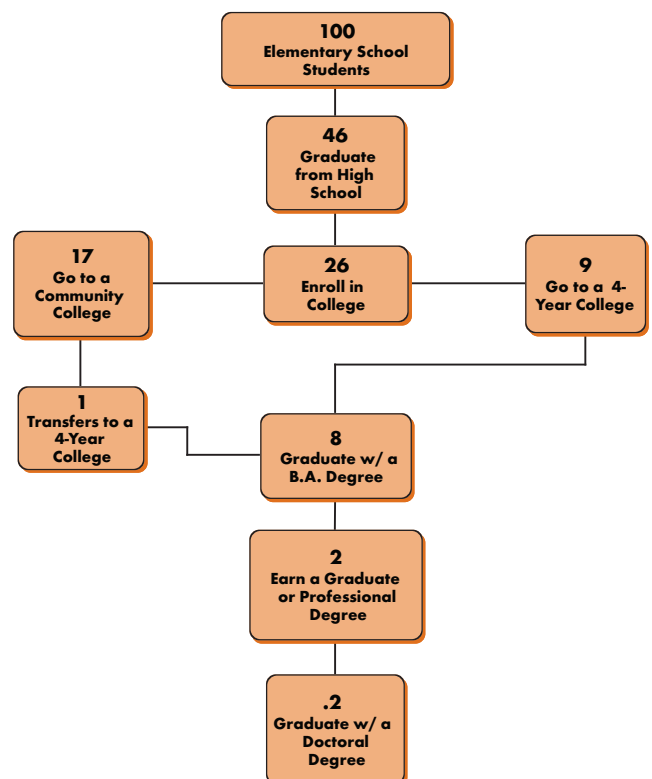
Academic institutions facilitate the flow of knowledge, skills, and students through the educational pipeline. Yet, no matter how one measures educational outcomes, Chicana/os suffer the lowest educational attainment of any major racial or ethnic group in the United States. This brief calls for the repair of the serious and persistent leaks in the Chicana/o educational pipeline.

U.S. Census data makes these unequal outcomes clear (see fig. 1).¹ Of the 100 Chicana and Chicano students who start at the elementary level, 54 of them drop out (or are pushed out) of high school and 46 continue on to graduate. Of the 46 who graduate from high school, about 26 continue on toward some form of postsecondary education. Of those 26, approximately 17 enroll in community colleges and nine enroll at four-year institutions. Of those 17 in community colleges, only one will transfer to a four-year institution.

Of the 9 Chicana/os attending a four-year college and the 1 community college transfer student, 8 will graduate with a baccalaureate degree. Finally, 2 Chicana/o students will continue on to earn a graduate or professional school degree and less than 1 will receive a doctorate. In contrast, of every 100 White elementary school students, 84 graduate high school, 26 graduate with a baccalaureate, and 10 earn a professional or graduate degree.

What are some of the conditions that impede the flow of Chicana/os through the educational pipeline?

Figure 1. Chicanas and Chicanos attained low academic outcomes at each point along the educational pipeline in 2000. (Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Educational Statistics, and the National Survey on Earned Doctorates.)



UNEQUAL K-12 SCHOOL CONDITIONS

In urban, suburban, and rural communities across the United States, Chicana/o students usually attend racially segregated, overcrowded schools. Within poorly maintained facilities, Chicana/os are often enrolled in classes where undertrained, undercredentialed faculty attempt to teach with minimal resources. Given the high teacher turnover rate in predominately Chicana/o schools, many classrooms contain year-round, long-term substitute teachers.

Further, Chicana/o students rarely encounter a Latina/o teacher, let alone a teacher trained in bilingual or multicultural education.² Instead of cultivating the cultural and linguistic assets Chicana/os bring to school, educators often engage in processes of “subtractive schooling,” assuming students have multiple cultural deficits rather than cultural advantages (see Valencia, 1997, 1999).

Far too many Chicana/o students continue to be “tracked” into remedial or vocational trajectories. Academically rigorous enrichment programs and courses (such as Gifted and Talented Education [GATE], Magnet, Honors and Advanced Placement [AP]) disproportionately underenroll Chicana/o students.

This unequal access corresponds with discriminatory school-based structures and practices rather than a lack of student or parent interest in academic enrichment. Furthermore, schools tend to provide Chicana/o students with less access to academic guidance counselors (see Ceja, 2001; Oakes, 2005; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002).

Rather than addressing structural inequities along the K-12 pipeline, schools continue to rely on standardized curriculum and high-stakes assessments, which yield statistically unreliable, inappropriate measures of student knowledge. For example, states are increasingly implementing high school exit exams, which

may prevent students from earning their diploma and further discourage their college pursuits (see Garcia, 2003; Garcia & Gopal, 2003; Valencia & Bernal, 2000).

FAILURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER FUNCTION

Most Chicana/os who pursue higher education begin at the community college. In California, for example, 40% of Latina/os who enroll in community colleges aspire to transfer to a four-year college or university. However, less than 10% of these students reach their goal of transferring to a four-year college.

This mismatch between aspiration and attainment indicates a problem with the basic transfer function at most institutions. Improving colleges’ transfer function begins with optimal academic conditions, such as access to courses that accrue transfer credit, financial resources, transfer counselors, and other student support services. Too many institutions provide less than optimal academic conditions for Chicana/o students and therefore curb the transfer function in community colleges (see Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004).

LIMITED BACCALAUREATE OPPORTUNITIES

After overcoming multiple barriers to meet and exceed college entrance requirements, Chicana/o students often find that their college classmates and professors believe they do not really “deserve” to attend a four-year university. As they learn to negotiate an often-hostile campus racial climate, Chicana/os tend to experience higher levels of stress than White undergraduate students. Balancing school work with off-campus employment limits the students’ time to speak with professors during office hours, ask an academic counselor for guidance, or participate in academic enrichment, tutoring, or research programs. Those students who still seek out mentors or role models to help guide their college

journey rarely have opportunities to interact with Faculty of Color generally and Chicana/o faculty in particular (see Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

EDUCATIONAL ISOLATION AND ALIENATION IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Chicana/o students often describe graduate school as a place where they feel invisible—like outsiders or imposters. Most graduate programs tend to be racially exclusive, featuring predominately White students, faculty, and curricula that omit Chicana/o histories and perspectives. Within this isolating context, Chicana/os regularly experience racial and gender microaggressions, lowered academic expectations from faculty, and pressure to be the spokesperson for all Chicana/os or all People of Color. Such experiences cause many Chicana/os to doubt their academic abilities, question the value of their scholarly contributions, and reconsider their decision to pursue a graduate degree (see Cuádriz, 1997; Gándara, 1995; Solórzano, 1998).

CHICANA/O EDUCATIONAL PERSISTENCE

To survive a history of institutional neglect in U.S. public schools, Chicana/os draw on various cultural and linguistic skills, knowledge, contacts, and abilities nurtured in their communities. For example, Chicana/os maintain high aspirations, develop networks of people and resources, and share their experiences of maneuvering through institutional barriers. Despite seemingly insurmountable odds, Chicana/o youth and their families continue to nurture this community cultural wealth and challenge an educational system that has consistently failed them. Nevertheless, Chicana/o students and families should not have to compensate for the failure of the United States to educate all of its students equally (see Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As multiple reports have previously concluded, a commitment to increase educational attainment for Chicana/os requires a plan of action. Institutions must better prepare Chicana/o students to navigate the educational pipeline successfully. Focusing on three critical transition points—priming Chicana/o K-12 students for college, community college students for transfer, and university undergraduates for graduate school—we offer the following policy recommendations:

- Increase access to academic enrichment at K-12 levels (GATE, honors, AP, magnet).
- Make basic college entrance requirements the “default” curriculum accessible to all high school students.
- Decrease the overreliance on high-stakes, inappropriate testing and assessment.
- Train bilingual, multicultural educators to challenge cultural deficit thinking and to acknowledge the cultural wealth of Chicana/o students.
- Reach out to parents as educational partners (making them aware of their rights: to *opt out* of vocational programs and inappropriate standardized testing and *opt in* to English Language Learner support and academic enrichment programs).
- Prioritize the transfer function as the central mission of community colleges.

- Develop measurements of accountability to Chicana/o communities.
- Take affirmative steps to support Chicana/o students by cultivating race-conscious admissions and retention programs.
- Recruit, retain, and support Chicana/o teachers, counselors, faculty, and administrators.

NOTES

1. Although the key data points are taken from the 2000 U.S. Census, the figure also includes 2000 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics and the National Survey on Earned Doctorates.
2. For example, in the 2004-05 academic year, while Latina/o students comprised about 47% of the California public school K-12 population, only 15% of their teachers were Latina and Latino (see California Department of Education, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>).

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