

Oportunidad: Student success, Hispanic achievement gaps and the future of Illinois

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Education is meant to be the great equalizer that lets every child reach his or her potential.

But a review of the achievement gap between Illinois' white and Hispanic students raises serious concerns about the ability of Illinois' public schools to prepare Hispanics for success in an increasingly competitive economy.

With Hispanics now making up a quarter of the state's entire student body and nearly 50 percent of Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, Hispanic students' level of achievement will have a significant impact on the state's economic future.^{1,2}

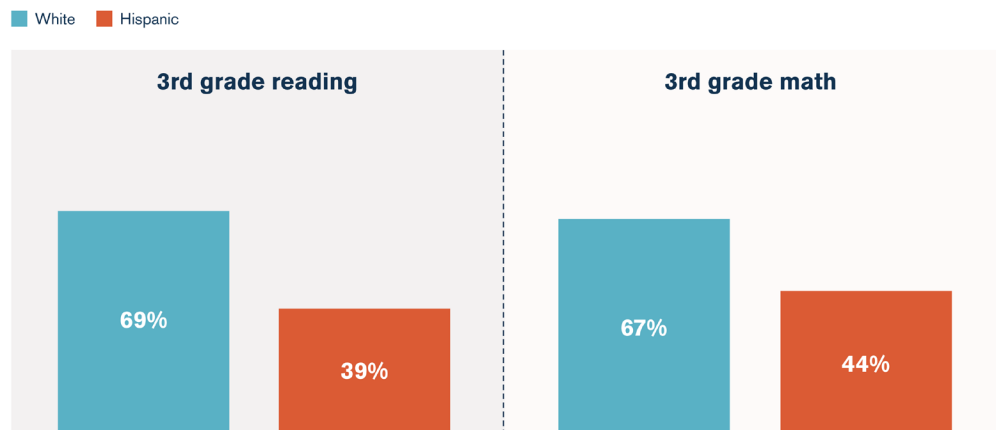
ILLINOIS' HISPANIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The gap between white and Hispanic students in reading and math is alarming and the overwhelming majority of Illinois' Hispanic high-school students aren't graduating college- or career-ready. For many Hispanic students, the learning gap will mean continuing hardship.³

Illinois Standard Achievement Test, or ISAT, results show that only 4 in 10 Hispanic third-graders in Illinois can read at grade level. By comparison, nearly 7 in 10 white third-graders in Illinois can read at grade level.⁴

Illinois' achievement gap

ISAT scores, percent meets or exceeds standards, 2014



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

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Predictably, this same achievement gap persists into high school. Only 29.4 percent of Hispanic students graduate college- and career-ready, as determined by their ACT scores. By comparison, 60.7 percent of whites are college- and career-ready.⁵

HISPANIC DISTRICT CASE STUDIES

An analysis of Illinois' student population shows that nearly 55 percent of the state's total Hispanic student population is located in just 10 school districts.

This concentration of Hispanic students allows for a closer look at how some of those districts are performing. Districts that are more than 75 percent Hispanic can serve as a proxy for how the educational system has failed to adapt to its growing Hispanic population.

Top 10 Hispanic districts in Illinois

Top 10 Illinois school districts by Hispanic enrollment, 2014

District	Total enrollment	Hispanic enrollment	% Hispanic
City of Chicago SD 299	397,138	181,411	46%
SD U-46 (Elgin)	40,221	20,468	51%
Waukegan CUSD 60	16,922	13,238	78%
Aurora East USD 131	14,522	12,554	86%
Cicero SD 99	12,827	11,901	93%
Rockford SD 205	28,480	7,614	27%
CUSD 300 (Algonquin)	20,721	7,401	36%
Valley View CUSD 365U (Bolingbrook)	17,134	7,171	42%
J. Sterling Morton HSD 201 (Cicero)	8,108	7,139	88%
Aurora West USD 129	12,560	6,888	55%
Top 10 total	568,633	275,785	48%
State total	2,046,857	503,527	25%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Interactive Report Card

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In Waukegan SD 60, for example, Hispanics represent nearly 75 percent of the student population. Only 36 percent of third-graders read at grade level and only 18 percent of high-school juniors will graduate college- or career-ready.

In Cicero SD 99, over 90 percent of the nearly 13,000 students are Hispanic. Only 1 in 4 third-graders can read at grade level in the district. At the nearby high school, only 18 percent of juniors will graduate college- or career-ready.

In Chicago SD 299, the district of Chicago Public Schools, almost half of all students are Hispanic. Only 38 percent of third-grade Hispanic students in this district can read at grade level, compared with over 75 percent of white students. This divergence in success is responsible for Chicago's poor overall achievement levels. By the time they graduate from high school, only 27 percent of Chicago's students will be ready for college coursework.

CLOSING THE GAP

The Hispanic achievement gap has persisted over many years, but real reforms have been lacking. More money and a bigger bureaucracy for the public-school system have not created positive results.^{6,7}

Illinois should lead through innovation by offering families and children more educational options and access to a variety of school types, whether public or private, big or small.

Fortunately, more than 25 states across the country, including Wisconsin and Indiana, are now finding ways to engage more families in the education of their children. These states offer parental choice in education in the form of school vouchers or educational savings accounts.

Under these programs, parents – not bureaucrats – decide where their children go to school and how and what they learn.

Illinois parents should have the same rights as parents in other school-choice states.

Their children can't afford to wait.

ENDNOTES

¹ Illinois Census Quickfacts, U.S. Census Bureau at quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/17000.html

² Chicago Public Schools demographic data at cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," Jan. 1, 2010, at aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/

⁴ Illinois Interactive Report Card, Illinois State Board of Education at isbe.net/assessment/report_card.htm

⁵ Data provided by ACT

⁶ Dabrowski, Ted, Josh Dwyer, and John Klingner, "Understanding Illinois' broken education funding system: A primer on General State Aid," Illinois Policy Institute, October 2013, at bit.ly/1fhlgxx

⁷ Scafidi, Benjamin, "The School Staffing Surge: Decades of Employment Growth in America's Public Schools," Friedman Foundation for Education Choice, October 2012 at edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/931/The-School-Staffing-Surge--Decades-of-Employment-Growth-in-Americas-Public-Schools.pdf