

# The Latino-White Education Gap in Connecticut: Indicators of Inequality in Access and Outcomes

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## Introduction

In Connecticut, access to educational opportunities differs widely by race and ethnicity. These disparities impact both student success and the success of the state as a whole. For Connecticut's just under 133,000<sup>1</sup> Latino students,<sup>2</sup> access to a robust and challenging education will allow them to pursue their chosen dreams and goals while also moving Connecticut toward having a more prepared workforce and competitive economy.<sup>3</sup>

In Connecticut, Latino students make up 25 percent of the school population.<sup>4</sup> They are both the largest percentage of students of color and the fastest growing population of students in the public school system. This growth demands that policymakers, advocates, educators, parents, students, and community members all understand how Latino students are faring in Connecticut's schools as compared with other racial/ethnic groups.

This brief, which is the second in a two-part series on racial-ethnic disparities in the education system,<sup>5</sup> explores some of the disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes between Latino and White students. First, we analyze disparities in access: access to same-race/ethnicity teachers, chronic absenteeism, access to challenging coursework, and school discipline. Second, we analyze disparities among three outcomes indicators: Smarter Balanced test scores,<sup>6</sup> high school graduation rates, and "school day" SAT scores.<sup>7</sup> While Connecticut has made some gains improving access to educational opportunities and outcomes for Latino students since 2011,<sup>8</sup> significant gaps still exist between Latino and White students.

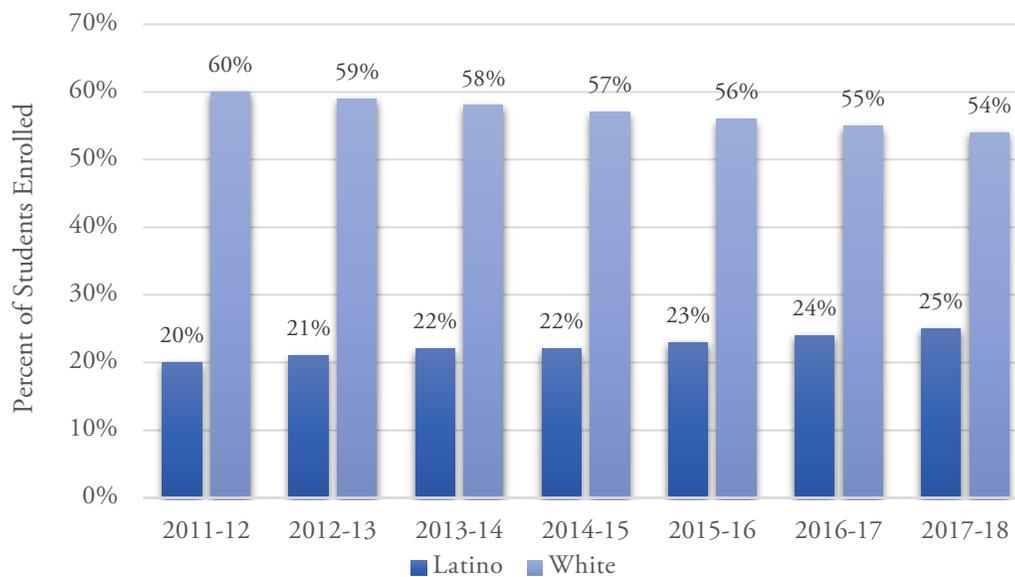
## Describing Latino Students in Connecticut's Public Schools

The Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) defines Latino as: "a student who traces their origin or descent to Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central and South America and other Spanish cultures regardless of race."<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper, when we refer to Latino students we will be using the above definition of students whose families trace their origin to a culture originating in Mexico, the Caribbean (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic), Central or South

America. When “Black” or “White” students are referred to in this paper we mean Black students with no Latino/Hispanic heritage and White students with no Latino/Hispanic heritage.

In the 2017-2018 school year (SY), Latino students constituted the second largest racial/ethnic group of students in the Connecticut public school system. Connecticut’s Latino students comprise 25 percent of the school system. White students, as a comparison, are 54 percent of the state’s students and are the largest racial/ethnic group of students in Connecticut’s public schools.<sup>10</sup> These proportions have not been static over the past six years, during which there has been a five-percentage point increase in Latino enrollment, as indicated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** *Percentage of Latino Students and White Students enrolled in Connecticut schools between 2011-2017*



*Source: Connecticut Department of Education – EdSight - Student Demographic Trends*

Although Latino students make up a large share of the student population in Connecticut, they are overwhelmingly clustered in Connecticut’s cities. As of SY 2017-2018, the school districts with the highest percentages of Latino students were: New Britain (64%), Hartford (53%), Waterbury (53%), Bridgeport (48%), New Haven (45%), and Stamford (44%).<sup>11</sup> These statistics reflect what we know to be broadly true about Connecticut’s schools—they are heavily segregated on the basis of race. According to the UCLA Civil Rights Project, Connecticut is ranked 14th highest in the nation for the segregation of Latino students.<sup>12</sup>

## English Learners

The SDE defines “English Learners” as students who “[have] a dominant language other than English and the Local Education Agency has determined that the [students are] not proficient in English on the basis of language proficiency testing, interviews and a review of the child’s school records.”<sup>13</sup> While not all Latino students are Spanish speaking or are English Learners (ELs), Spanish-speaking students

are the largest population of English Learners (previously called English Language Learners) in Connecticut's Schools. This reality creates additional factors to consider when discussing success for this population of students.

Of the 528,040 students enrolled in Connecticut schools, 51,738 (10 percent) speak Spanish as their dominant language (the primary language spoken in the home).<sup>14, 15</sup> Seventy-two percent of English Learners in the state speak Spanish as their home language. While there are English Learners in all grade levels, they are most heavily concentrated in the early grades. In the 2014-2015 school year, 44 percent of English Learners were in grades K-3.

It should be noted that meeting the above definition of EL does not mean a student cannot benefit from continued language supports in the classroom. This is true for two reasons—first, all EL students are limited to 30 months of bilingual education, unless the local board of education or SDE approves an extension.<sup>16</sup> Second, English language proficiency has many different components. It is possible for a student to be proficient at, for example, conversational speech but not at academic writing, which could impact their placement in EL services.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, to ensure the continued academic success of EL students once they leave formal EL services, practices that support the learning of these students in general education classes is essential.<sup>18</sup>

### Students Immigrating from Latin America

Connecticut is home to a diverse immigrant community. In 2015, 15 percent of the state's population was born outside of the United States, and of native-born Connecticut residents, 13 percent had at least one immigrant parent.<sup>19</sup> These families make significant contributions to the state: seventeen percent of Connecticut's workforce are immigrants, and in 2014, they paid \$1.8 billion dollars in state and local taxes.<sup>20</sup>

Among families where at least one parent is an immigrant, nearly half are Latino.<sup>21</sup> Children of Latino parents comprise the largest population of children with at least one parent who had immigrated to Connecticut, and this number is increasing. In 2012, the proportion of children living in a household with at least one parent who had emigrated from Latin America was 42 percent (of all children living in immigrant households), by 2016 that number had risen to 49 percent.<sup>22</sup>

While not all Latino children in the state are immigrants themselves or have parents who are immigrants, the impact of immigration on educational attainment is clear.<sup>23</sup> On top of the general concerns that a young person has while in school, students in families who immigrated to the United States often also juggle adapting to a new culture, translating for their families (or learning a new language themselves), and experiencing ongoing concerns and threats regarding both their own and family members immigration status.

All of these factors have a real and measurable impact on how Latino students who are in families that immigrated to Connecticut perform in school.<sup>24</sup> For example, fear experienced regarding immigration raids by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency has had extremely negative impacts on the mental health and educational attainment of these students. A multi-state survey completed by the UCLA Civil Rights project asked more than 5,000 teachers about the impact of recent changes in

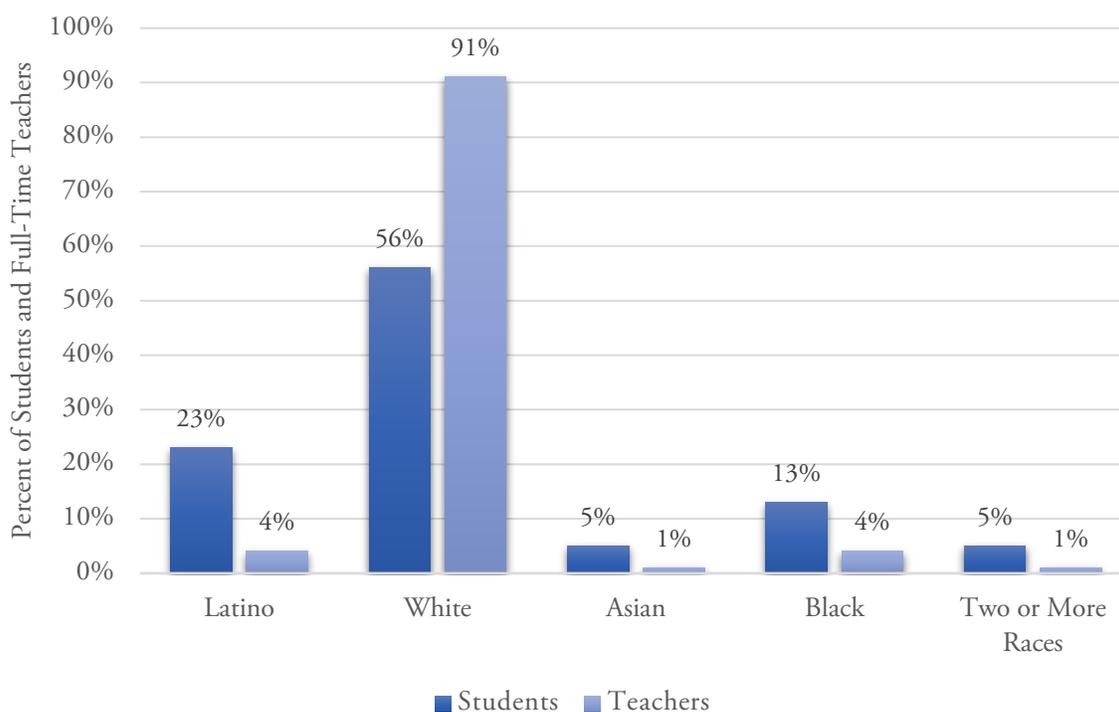
immigration policy on their students. The survey found that, in Northeastern school districts, 61 percent of teachers reported that they had observed an impact of immigration enforcement on their Latino students regardless of students' immigration status (undocumented, documented, or native-born).<sup>25</sup> The impact on these students was often severe—57 percent of teachers noted an increase in absences, and 60 percent noted some impact on students' academic performance.<sup>26</sup> For all Latino students to have equitable access to education in Connecticut, schools should address their unique concerns such as immigration status and dominant language when designing education reforms.

## Disparities in the Classroom

We begin by exploring four key educational experiences—access to same-race/ethnicity teachers, consistent attendance, access to rigorous courses, and fair treatment in school discipline matters. While these are not the only experiences that have a bearing on the success of Latino students, the indicators that we discuss below have been shown to be important factors that influence student success across racial and ethnic groups.<sup>27, 28</sup>

### Disparities in Access to Same Race Teachers

**Figure 2:** Racial Composition of Teachers and Students in Connecticut Schools



\*Please note that these numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number, meaning that when added together, they may not necessarily add up to 100%, exact numbers are available at [edsight.ct.gov](http://edsight.ct.gov). \*\* Both Native American and Pacific Islander/Hawaiian Native students have been excluded from this graph as the numbers of both teachers and students is less than 1 percent.

Source: CT Department of Education – EdSight – Student Enrollment Counts and Educator Demographics SY 2015-16

As can be seen in Figure 2, despite 23 percent of students identifying as Latino, the most recent count of teachers (done in SY 2015-2016) found that just under 4 percent of teachers were Latino. White teachers made up 92 percent of the full-time teaching staff, but White students only comprised 55 percent of Connecticut's student body. The disparity between Connecticut's proportion of Latino teachers and Latino students is concerning because having access to same-race/ethnicity teachers has a positive impact on educational achievement for students of color.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup> Increased proportions of Latino teachers have been linked to lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates for Latino students.<sup>32</sup> By bolstering student confidence and reducing feelings of marginalization among Latino students, Latino teachers can act as a protective factor against experiences such as racist comments and punitive discipline policies, which helps increase the likelihood of Latino students graduating.<sup>33</sup>

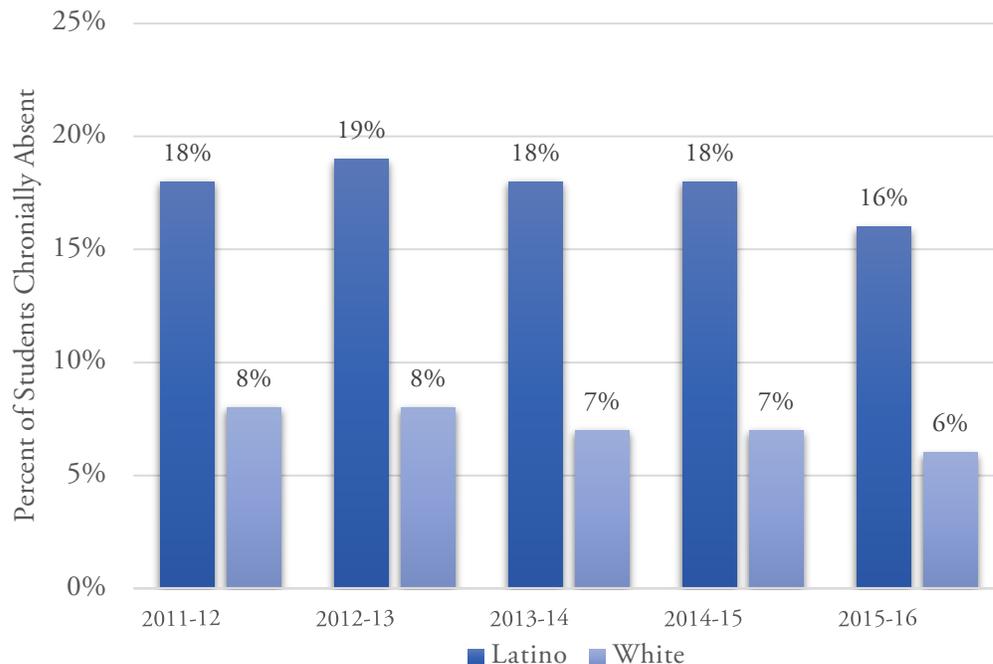
### Disparities in Attendance and Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined by the State Department of Education as missing ten percent or more of the days in a school year (18 or more).<sup>34</sup> Significant evidence suggests that missed educational time has an impact on student success. Students who are chronically absent in kindergarten are more likely to be held back or retained in third grade, and those who are chronically absent in middle or high school have an increased risk of dropping out.<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, chronic absenteeism is often caused by problems unrelated to willful truancy and skipping school.<sup>36</sup> Health issues (both mental and physical), school climate (e.g., high levels of bullying and violence in schools), and community/family factors (e.g., a parent's mental health status) all act as major contributors to chronic absence.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, when discussing students who are immigrants or come from families of immigrants, school absenteeism can be the result of two other realities—the destabilizing effects of immigration and fear of discrimination. For example, to ensure that familial relationships are maintained, students may be taken out of school for an extended period to visit their home country or parents may keep a child out of school for fear of being separated during an immigration raid.<sup>38, 39</sup> Such considerations should be taken into account when creating interventions for chronically absent students.

In 2014 Latino students in Connecticut who missed less than 9 days of school per year had a graduation rate of 86.6 percent. Latino students who are chronically absent (missing more than 18 days) had a graduation rate of 38 percent.<sup>40</sup> Figure 3 shows that sixteen percent of Latino students were chronically absent during the 2015-2016 school year. The rate of chronic absenteeism among Latino students is higher than any other racial/ethnic group of students in Connecticut.<sup>41</sup> Although the number of Latino students who are chronically absent has decreased by 2 percentage points over the last six years, Latino students remain over two times more likely to be chronically absent than their White peers.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 3: Percentage of Chronically Absent Students Who Identified as White or Latino**



Source: Connecticut Department of Education – EdSight – Chronic Absenteeism Trends 2011-2017

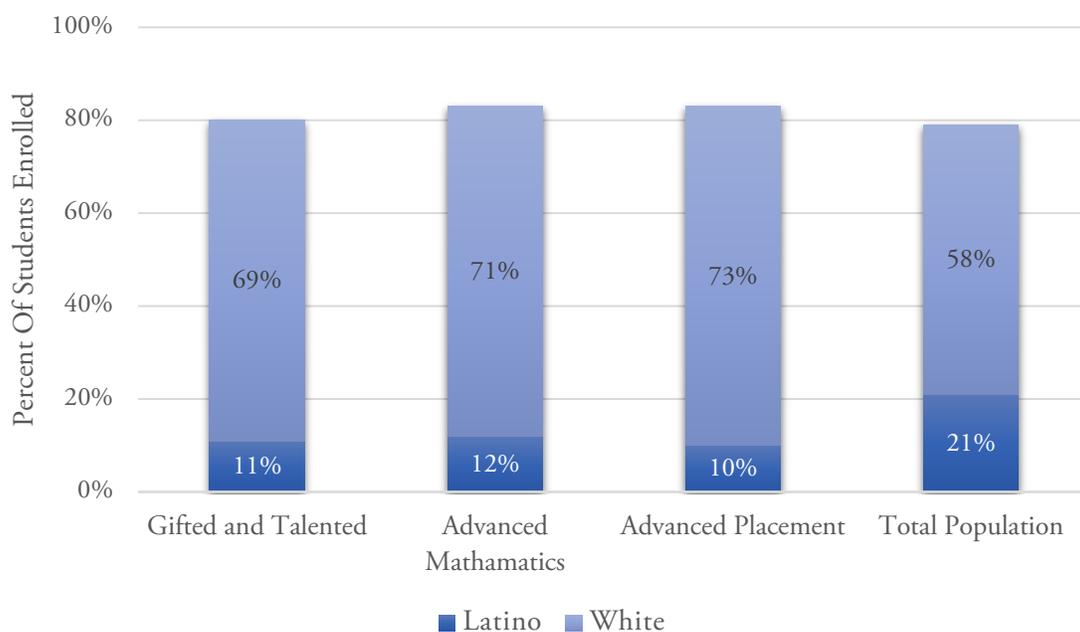
### Disparities in Access to Challenging Coursework

As college entrance processes and entering the job market have become more competitive, students need to develop more complex thinking and analytical skills to succeed in today’s universities and workforce.<sup>43</sup> Honors programs and gifted and talented programs offer students chances to engage in the kinds of critical thought necessary for college success and 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce participation.<sup>44</sup> When looking at three different indicators—enrollment in gifted and talented programs, advanced mathematics courses, and Advanced Placement courses—there are significant disparities in the enrollment of Latino students compared to that of White students.

Gifted and talented programs in Connecticut support K-12 students who have been identified by a teacher, parent or other school official as having “extraordinary learning ability or outstanding talent in the creative arts, the development of which requires programs or services beyond those ordinarily provided in the regular school programs but which may be provided through special education as part of the public school program.”<sup>45</sup> In the 2013-14 school year, the last year for which this data is available, White students were six times more likely than Latino students to participate in gifted and talented programs despite the fact that the statewide population of White students is almost three times larger than the Latino population.<sup>46</sup> The low enrollment of Latino students in these types of programs is not likely due to individual student aptitude but rather the result of institutional factors, such as the lack of teachers of color.<sup>47</sup> This assertion is supported by research conducted by Vanderbilt University which demonstrates that in schools with higher numbers of Latino teachers, Latino students are more likely to be recommended for gifted and talented programs.<sup>48</sup>

Enrollment in high school advanced courses also shows disparities between Latino and White students. In SY 2013-14, White students were nearly six times more likely to be enrolled in Advanced Mathematics and over seven times more likely to be enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 4:** *Percentage of Students Enrolled in Gifted and Talented, Advanced Mathematics, and at Least One Advanced Placement Course by Race in 2013-14 School Year*



*Source: United States Department of Education – Civil Rights Data Reporting 2013-14 School Year*

### Disparities in Exclusionary Discipline Rates

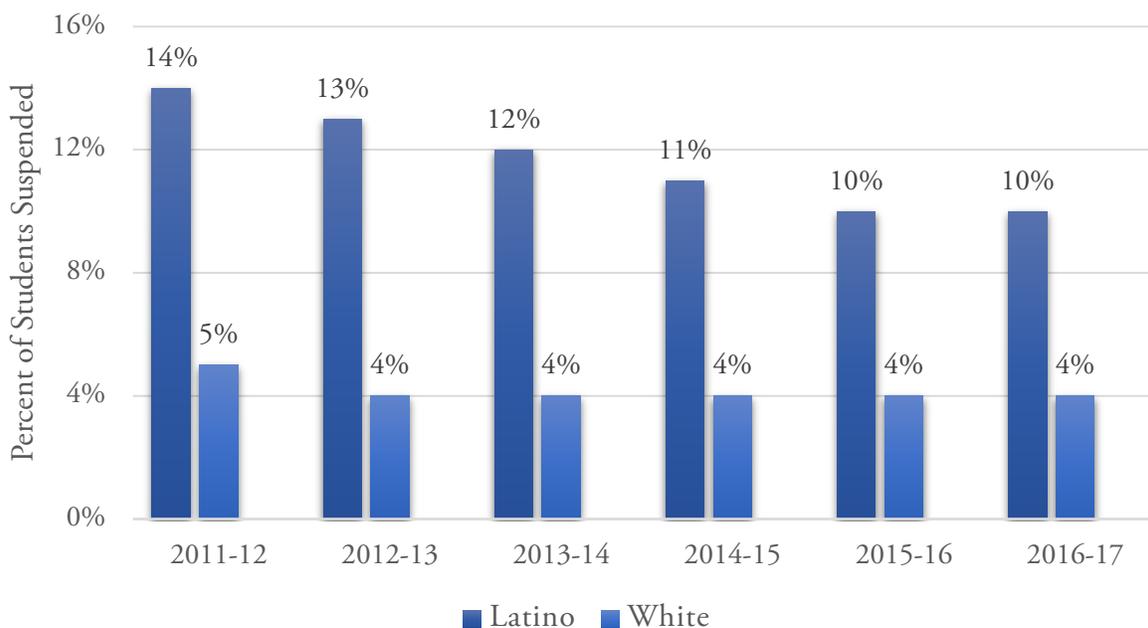
“Exclusionary Discipline” refers to any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes students from their usual educational settings.<sup>50</sup> These forms of discipline can include in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, and in-school arrests. In Connecticut, Latino students experience considerably higher rates of exclusionary discipline than their White peers. While the percentage of Latino students who were suspended between SY 2011-2012 and SY 2016-2017 decreased by 4 percentage points, Latino students are still suspended at more than double the rate of White students.

Despite recent legislation limiting exclusionary discipline for Pre-K through 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, racial/ethnic disparities in schools’ use of exclusionary discipline for very young children persists. Of the 1,674 Pre-K through 2<sup>nd</sup> graders who were suspended from Connecticut public schools in the 2015-16 school year, 1,198 (71%) were Black or Latino and 979 (58%) were Black or Latino boys.<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, Latino students are often subjected to far more severe forms of discipline such as in-school arrests and referrals to law enforcement, which are direct pipelines to the justice system. In

the 2014-2015 school year, the rate that Latino students were arrested in school (5 per 1,000 students) was almost three times the rate that White students were arrested in school (2 per 1,000 students).<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 5:** *Percentage of Students Suspended between 2011-12 and 2016-17 School Years by Race/Ethnicity*



*Source: Connecticut Department of Education – EdSight – Suspensions Trends 2011-2017*

It is important to note that even though Latino students are punished at higher rates than White students, it does not necessarily mean that they misbehave more. Research suggests that Latino youth are significantly more likely to be punished for discretionary violations (violations that are subjective and not punishable under the law, such as failure to remove a hat and disruptive classroom behavior) than their White peers.<sup>53</sup> Implicit bias (also known as subconscious bias) likely plays a large role in creating this disparity. Over the last 20 years, several studies have suggested that students of color are often treated less favorably than their White peers by teachers, administrators, and law enforcement officials due to both explicit and implicit racial biases.<sup>54</sup>

According to a statement issued by the American Psychological Association, there is little evidence that punitive, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies positively impact school climate.<sup>55</sup> Rather, exclusionary discipline – especially in its more severe forms including expulsions and in-school arrests – strongly correlates to more negative educational and social outcomes than to positive changes in student behavior. In Connecticut, students who had been disciplined did significantly worse on both Math and English Language Arts assessments than their peers who were not subjected to similar disciplinary actions.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, a study done in Texas found that students (regardless of race/ethnicity) who had been suspended or expelled were nearly three times more likely to end up in contact with the juvenile justice system than students who had not been suspended or expelled for

similar infractions.<sup>57</sup> A study conducted in Connecticut examined the unique predictors of youth outcomes. This study found that even after adjusting for co-occurring variables such as poverty and residential segregation, exclusionary discipline rates significantly predict juvenile arrests in communities, suggesting that exclusionary discipline practices are linked to some of the most negative outcomes for youth.<sup>58</sup>

## Linking Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunities to Disparities in Student Success Outcomes

Each of these indicators – lack of access to Latino teachers, chronic absence, low levels of representation in challenging classes, and high rates of exclusionary discipline all have an impact on outcomes for Latino students. Latino students who have Latino teachers are less likely to drop out and are more likely to attend college.<sup>59</sup> Latino students who are disciplined harshly do worse on Connecticut standardized tests and are more likely to experience involvement with the juvenile justice system.<sup>60, 61</sup> Latino students who have access to college preparatory courses (like Advance Placement and advanced math) are more prepared for the expectations of college and future careers.<sup>62</sup>

The following section examines the educational outcomes for Latino students in Connecticut and finds that the state’s data confirms what the scholarly research suggests: Latino students do not just experience less access to educational opportunity, they also experience poorer educational outcomes as measured by standardized tests, graduation rates, and college admissions exams.

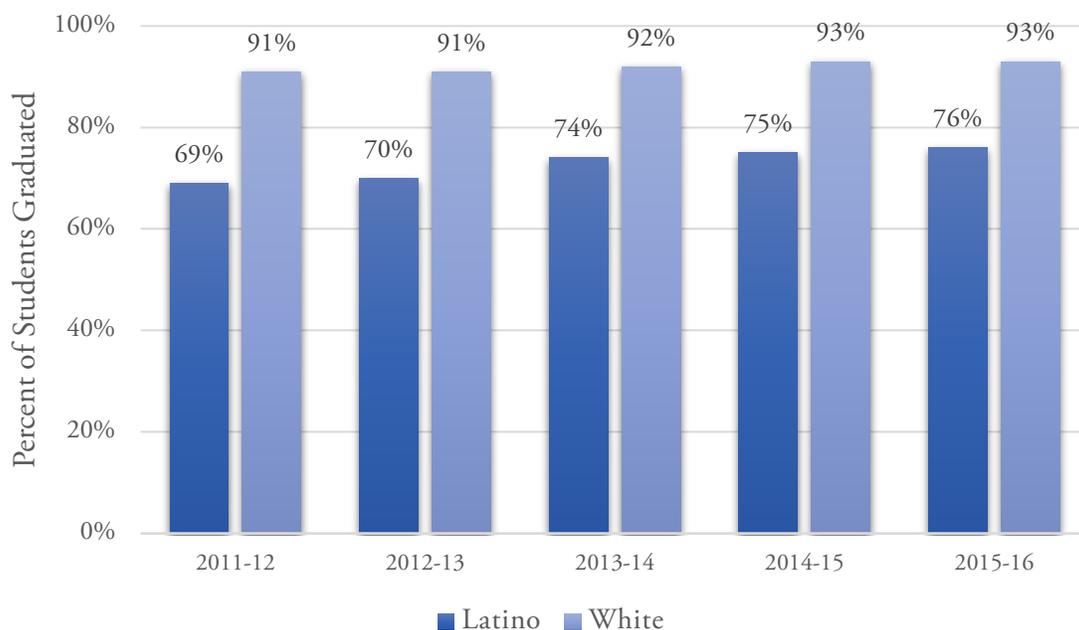
## Disparities in Educational Outcomes

For the purposes of this paper, we define academic outcomes using standardized measures such as graduation rate within four years and achievement on state exams.<sup>63</sup> Indicators like graduation rates and standardized testing are often incomplete assessments of individual student aptitude, but taken together these measures can indicate if a school system is meeting its stated student achievement goals for the majority of its students. When analyzing state-wide trends in outcomes, it is clear that a significant gap exists between Latino and White students in graduation rates, Smarter Balanced scores, and college entrance exams.

### Disparities in Graduation Rates

In the 2015-2016 school year, 76 percent of Latino students graduated in four years as compared to 92 percent of their White counterparts. When looking at English Learners (ELs), of whom, 72 percent are Latino, the rates are lower.<sup>64</sup> In the 2015-2016 school year, only 67 percent of ELs graduated in four years. Although the number of Latino students graduating has risen by about 8 percentage points in the last five years, the gap in graduation rates between Latino students and White students remains wide. Policymakers, advocates, and community leaders still have much work to do in helping Latino students attain graduation rates at levels similar to White students.

*Figure 6: Percentage of Students Graduating in Four Years between SY 2011-12 and SY 2015-16 by Race*



*Source: Connecticut Department of Education - EdSight*

## Disparities in Standardized Testing Scores

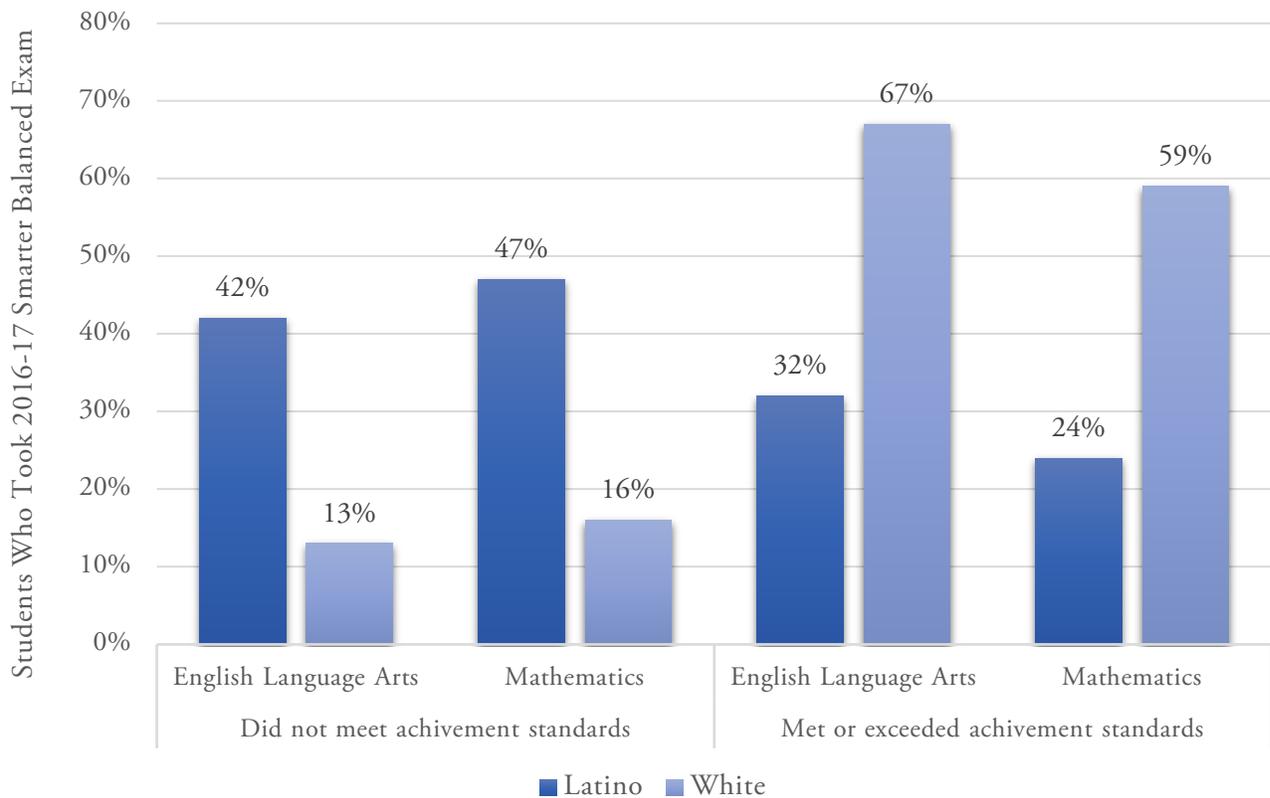
When looking at Smarter Balanced test scores, the disparities between Latino and White students are even larger than the disparities in graduation rates. As can be seen in Figure 7, 47 percent of Latino students did not meet the Math achievement standards and 42 percent of students did not meet the English Language Arts standards in the 2016-17 school year. Amongst ELs, 64 percent did not meet math standards and 68 percent did not meet English standards. Comparing these results to those of White students—of whom only 16 percent did not meet math standards and 13 percent did not meet English language arts standards—highlights a stark disparity in outcomes for Latino students.

While standardized tests are not always the best indicator of whether students are succeeding in school,<sup>65</sup> they provide important information about where students struggle and can be used to help raise achievement.<sup>66</sup> For example, when students do not meet English Language Arts standards on the Smarter Balanced test, this indicates that they may struggle with the mechanics, complexity, or analytic processes involved in reading, and it may help schools identify students who need additional or differentiated instruction.<sup>67</sup>

Developing these reading skills is critical for students to be able to learn independently from texts—a necessary skill in order to do well across subject areas where students are reading to learn. These skills are important for success in middle and high school, as well as college. Furthermore, reading proficiency is an important predictor of which types of careers children will be able to access later in life.<sup>68</sup> Many entry-level jobs have higher reading requirements than those required for high school

graduation. These disparities mean that some Latino students will struggle to access professions that provides the economic security that allows themselves and their communities to thrive.

**Figure 7:** Percent of Latino and White Students who “did not meet” or “met/exceeded” English Language Arts and Math Smarter Balanced Exam SY 2016-17<sup>69</sup>

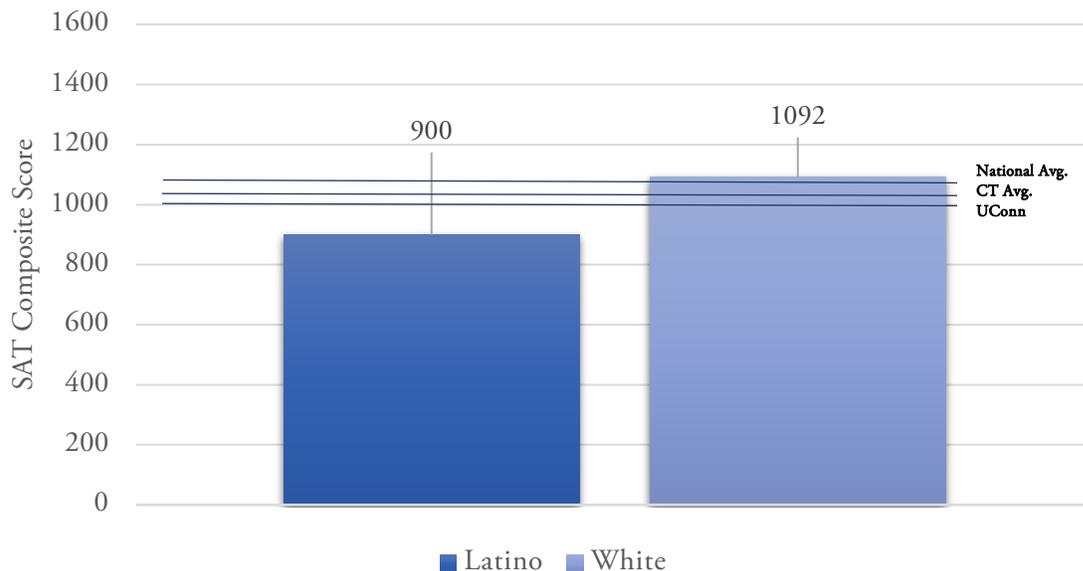


Source: Connecticut Department of Education – EdSight – Smarter Balanced Assessments 2016-17

### Disparities in College Entrance Exam Scores

Latino students in Connecticut score significantly lower than their White peers on the “school day” SAT. The “school day” SAT is given once a year to all Connecticut 11<sup>th</sup> graders, as compared to the proctored SAT given on weekends which students must sign-up for themselves. In the 2016-17 school year, Connecticut’s overall average “school day” SAT score was 1031 (out of 1600), and the national average score for students in 2017 was 1083 out of 1600.<sup>70</sup> Latino students in Connecticut, on the other hand, scored well below the state mean; the average score for Latino students in Connecticut was 900. ELs had a lower score of 771. The means for Latino students and EL students fall well below the mean for White students in Connecticut of 1092. In college admissions, SAT scores are a significant factor in the college admissions process. As a result, having a low SAT score may prevent Latino students from attending the college of their choice. To provide context for the impact of these disparities, the incoming classes of the University of Connecticut had an average composite score of 1000.<sup>71</sup>

**Figure 8:** Average Scores on the “School Day” SAT in School Year 2016-17



Source: Connecticut Department of Education – EdSight – “School Day SAT” Scores 2016-17

## Policy Recommendations

### ***(1) Require anti-bias/anti-racism training for all school personnel, especially teachers and administrators.***

Implicit biases influence which students are disciplined by teachers and administrators and the methods of discipline chosen. These biases contribute to the high rates of suspension and expulsion for students of color.<sup>72</sup> Requiring teachers and school administrators to undergo anti-bias training may reduce the incidence of disproportionate punishment of Latino students.<sup>73</sup> Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 10-220a and Connecticut General Statutes 10-145a, cultural competency is already required for both educator prep programs and as in-service training, but more must be done to ensure that anti-bias training are routine and commonplace in schools.

In addition to anti-bias training, teachers and administrators also need ongoing support as they implement skills and strategies in complex classroom and school system environments. Professional development training without ongoing practice and feedback is often ineffective for producing long-term change that is integrated across different contexts.<sup>74, 75</sup> Learning environments similar to those teachers provide for their students—that is, environments that allow for safe practice, that provide benchmarks and feedback, and that gradually increase the complexity of information and skill mastery—are more likely to yield results than one-time training experiences.<sup>76</sup> Particularly, given the necessity for individuals to receive non-judgmental feedback and experience trust in order to break down implicit biases,<sup>77</sup> it is important to create a system to provide ongoing support to teachers and administrators as they seek to make lasting change in their classrooms and schools.<sup>78</sup> One suggestion might be for districts to employ anti-bias coaches similar to content-area coaches that provide

teachers ongoing professional development, unit and lesson planning ideas, observation, and constructive skill improvement feedback. This would ensure not only that teachers and administrators see short-term gains, but also help to ensure that the training has a long-term impact.

***(2) Increase the number of Latino teachers and expand support for teachers of color overall.***

The nurturing anti-racist environment that Latino children need to thrive will not be created simply through trainings, but also through a teaching workforce that is as diverse as the children in Connecticut's schools. Latino teachers often share experiences and cultures with their students and have higher expectations for them than White teachers often do.<sup>79</sup> Given these important factors, there is a strong relationship between having Latino teachers in the classroom and students' academic success,<sup>80</sup> and in light of the increasing number of Latino students in the state of Connecticut, the need to increase the number of Latino educators is great.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports the recommendations of the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Committee to increase the hiring and retention of teachers of color in the state.<sup>81</sup> Both SDE and local school districts have introduced promising programs to meet this challenge. Danbury, Hartford, and Waterbury Public Schools have created "Grow Your Own" programs to incentivize students in their districts to pursue careers in teaching.<sup>82</sup> While the success of Connecticut's "Grow Your Own" programs is currently unstudied, research on similar programming in other states suggests that these programs can have an especially positive impact on high school students' interest in pursuing teaching.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, partnerships between SDE, The Center on Great Teachers, and the Northeast Comprehensive Center has yielded a six-session informational series to examine the potential for unconscious bias in hiring and selection practices.<sup>84</sup>

***(3) Expand access to programs that involve Latino parents and community members in interventions regarding chronic absenteeism.***

Latino children have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the state.<sup>85</sup> This reality has severe impacts on Latino students' academic success. While lack of parental involvement is not always the cause of chronic absence, parental involvement in interventions once a child has been habitually absent can help correct the problem. This is especially true of programming that opens up channels of communication between schools and parents regarding attendance, celebrates improvements in attendance with students and their families, and connects chronically absent students with community-based mentors.<sup>86</sup> A study of the chronic absenteeism reduction practices of 39 schools nationwide found that programs which engage parents and community members in the process saw greater reductions in chronic absenteeism than those that did not.<sup>87</sup> These quantitative findings are echoed within qualitative research where focus groups of Latino students discuss how they often see parents as a significant source of motivation and emotional support who are essential in the monitoring of attendance—especially during elementary school.<sup>88</sup>

***(4) Expand access to data on discipline including detailed suspension and expulsion data (including a breakdown of offenses) by district, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender.***

Effective policy development to combat disproportionality in exclusionary discipline rates requires that researchers, advocates, and families have access to more robust data than is currently available. The published data must include not only the number of school suspensions and expulsions but also reasons for these disciplinary actions disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, schools need to review their data regularly to enact appropriate reforms, improve school policy, and assist specific teachers in formulating appropriate responses to student behaviors.

***(5) Ensure that schools have necessary funding and support to offer a full range of courses and programs.***

Existing educational funding disparities in the state have resulted in under-resourced urban schools, which disproportionately serve Black and Latino youth.<sup>89</sup> Insufficient funding results in reduced offerings of higher-level courses and gifted and talented programs and accounts for some of the racial disparities in access to advanced coursework. As Connecticut's economy demands higher-level skills, it is imperative that schools afford Latino students the same opportunity to access upper-level classes. Closing gaps in access to advanced courses will help narrow gaps in access to well-paid and challenging employment that exist between White and Latino communities. Currently, Connecticut's system for raising revenue to fund education as well as systems for distributing this funding has severe flaws.

We urge lawmakers to prioritize fully funding the Payment-In-Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program that reimburses cities for property tax losses due to exemptions applicable to state-owned property, certain federally-owned property, and non-profit property including colleges and hospitals.<sup>90</sup> These tax-exempt properties are accessed by and benefit residents across the state; fully funding PILOT using General Fund dollars is the fair policy and would help urban municipalities recapture this lost revenue and use it to improve their schools.

Additionally, we urge the General Assembly to consider implementing a statewide property tax to more equitably raise and distribute education resources across the state without placing an unfair tax load onto less affluent communities.<sup>91</sup> In Connecticut, property tax is the chief revenue stream for municipalities; towns and cities use this revenue to provide public services including education, public safety, infrastructure maintenance, and social services.<sup>92</sup> However, because municipalities vary in the affluence of their residents as well as how much of their property is taxable, many towns find that they are unable to provide adequate services without setting unfairly high mill rates. A statewide property tax such as the one used in Vermont could partially solve this problem by stabilizing the mill rate that supports education statewide while maintaining municipal autonomy over how much money they choose to spend on education.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

Latino students make up a significant proportion of students in the Connecticut public school system, and that proportion continues to grow. Although most Latino students in Connecticut are clustered within its urban core cities, they vary along several factors critical for providing a safe and responsive education including the primary language spoken in their homes and family immigration status. Understanding how these factors may impact Latino students' ability to access educational opportunities is a critical first step to reducing the Latino-White education gap in Connecticut.

Across the state, Latino students experience disparities in access to same race teachers, fair discipline policies, and rigorous courses, leaving many of them unprepared to succeed in college and to access challenging career paths. Although Latino children in Connecticut work hard to learn and thrive, disparities in the opportunity to access a high-quality education lead to disparities in educational outcomes.<sup>94, 95, 96</sup> Engaging Latino students' parents is an important step for all schools to ensure that students attend school and are supported throughout their studies. When schools engage with parents, it can help teachers and administrators understand the specific external pressures Latino families face and the educational needs of each student.

The state's educational policies also shape whether or not Latino students have access to opportunities for successful completion of their public school education. Reforming Connecticut's mechanisms for raising and distributing education revenue so that it is more equitable will be vital to funding the policies and services Latino children and youth need to thrive in school. For example, more funding ensures that all students can access AP or gifted and talented programs. Implicit bias training for educators and administrators could have a positive impact on the ways in which all school personnel respond to Latino students and decrease the number of Latino students suspended and expelled each year.

Connecticut is in a period of slow economic growth and changing demographics,<sup>97, 98</sup> which makes improving educational opportunities for Latino students both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. Disparities in access and outcomes limit the ability of Latino students to reach their full creative, academic, and professional potentials. They also stifle the ability of Latino students and the communities that they come from to contribute to a prosperous Connecticut. Reducing these disparities is an essential part of a comprehensive economic development strategy and will help ensure not only that these children thrive but that Connecticut continues to thrive as a state well into the future.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (2017). [Latino Student Enrollment Counts by School District]. Retrieval from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

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[http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/CSDE\\_LDS\\_PhysicalDictionary.pdf](http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/CSDE_LDS_PhysicalDictionary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Laboissier, M., & Mourshed, M. (2017). *Closing the Skills Gap: Creating workforce-development programs that work for everyone*. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/closing-the-skills-gap-creating-workforce-development-programs-that-work-for-everyone>.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Connecticut State Department of Education, In the last 6 years, the population of Latino students rose from 20 percent in 2011-2012 to 25 percent in the last school year. Retrieved from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

<sup>5</sup> Hudson, C. S. (2018, January). *The Black-White Education Gap in Connecticut: Indicators of Inequality in Access and Outcomes*. Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/black-white-education-gap-connecticut-indicators-inequality-access-and-outcomes>

<sup>6</sup> The Smarter Balanced Assessment is a statewide assessment given to all 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders in the state on reading and math.

<sup>7</sup> The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) offered by the College Board given to all Connecticut 11<sup>th</sup> graders free of charge during the school day, often used for college admissions.

<sup>8</sup> This year reflects the first available year for data from the Connecticut State Department of Education data portal - EdSight

<sup>9</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education, State Department of Education. (2017, January). *EdSight Data Dictionary*. Retrieved from [http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/CSDE\\_LDS\\_PhysicalDictionary.pdf](http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/CSDE_LDS_PhysicalDictionary.pdf)

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