

CLOSING
**EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**
FOR
**LATINA/O
STUDENTS**
IN UTAH

INITIATING A POLICY DISCOURSE AND FRAMEWORK



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Closing Educational Achievement Gaps for Latina/o Students in Utah:

Initiating a Policy Discourse and Framework

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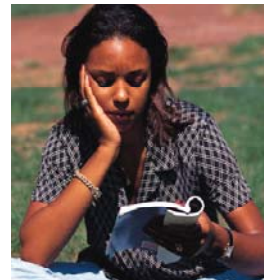
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Finally, academic performance in the state as measured by multiple outcome indicators such as Criterion Referenced Tests, UBSCT, advanced courses, Advanced Placement exams, the SAT I, ACT, and NAEP illustrates that existing achievement gaps should be a matter of great concern. Consequently, we invite others to this dialogue and to seek serious and equitable solutions to eliminate gaps in access and outcomes in the state.

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Authors' Note:

This policy report was a collaborative effort; each author contributed equally. It exemplifies our commitment and support of research that draws attention to existing achievement gaps and promotes action towards eliminating these gaps.

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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
INTRODUCTION	11
UTAH'S SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS	12
UTAH'S POLITICAL CONTEXT	14
AN OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION FOR LATINA/O STUDENTS	16
Latina/o Student Enrollment	17
<i>District-level demographic data</i>	17
<i>Most Utah Latinas/os educated in seven districts</i>	19
Current Performance Indicators	20
<i>Criterion Referenced Tests</i>	20
<i>Iowa Test of Basic Skills Utah Basic Skills</i>	22
<i>Competency Test</i>	23
<i>Advanced Placement Participation</i>	26
<i>SAT Reasoning Test and ACT Performance</i>	27
<i>National Assessment of Educational Progress</i>	29
<i>Dropout and Graduation Rates</i>	30
<i>Higher Education Enrollment & Attainment</i>	31
INITIATING A DISCOURSE OF LATINA/O EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT	32
Leadership	33
Political Culture and Values	34
State Policy, Practice, and Reform	35
<i>Accountability system</i>	35
<i>School finance and funding</i>	36
<i>Teacher / administrator diversity and quality</i>	39
<i>Curriculum and pedagogy</i>	40
<i>School factors</i>	41
CONCLUSION	44
REFERENCES	45

Figures and Tables

FIGURE 1: Utah Public School Enrollment Demographics, 2005-2006 (p. 8)	TABLE 1: Fall Enrollment and Latina/o Percentage Increase (p.18)
FIGURE 2: Percent Latina/o – Student Enrollment (p.16)	TABLE 2: Seven School Districts with 75% of Latina/o Student Population (p.19)
FIGURE 3: Student Group Proficiency in Language Arts CRT for 2004 & 2005, All Grades (p.21)	TABLE 3: Latina/o Student Enrollment as a Percentage of Total District Student Enrollment, Fall 2004 (p.19)
FIGURE 4: Student Group Proficiency in Mathematics CRT for 2004 & 2005, All Grades (p.21)	TABLE 4: 2004 Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science CRT Percent Proficient, All Grades (p.22)
FIGURE 5: Student Group Proficiency in Science CRT for 2004 & 2005, All Grades (p.21)	TABLE 5: 2005 Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science CRT Percent Proficient, All Grades (p.22)
FIGURE 6: UBSCT Percent of Students Passing Rates after October 2005 for Class of 2006 (p.26)	TABLE 6: Class of 2006 Cumulative UBSCT Performance for All Student Groups, Fall 2005 (p.24)
FIGURE 7: UBSCT Percent of Students Passing Rates after October 2005 for Class of 2007 (p.26)	TABLE 7: Class of 2007 Cumulative UBSCT Performance for All Student Groups, Fall 2005 (p.25)
FIGURE 8: 2003 NAEP 4 th and 8 th Grade Reading and Mathematics, Percent Proficient (or above) for Latina/o and White Students in Utah and the Nation (p.29)	TABLE 8: Percentage of Utah Students by Race/Ethnicity Taking Advanced Courses (p.27)
FIGURE 9: 2005 NAEP 4 th and 8 th Grade Reading and Mathematics, Percent Proficient (or above) for Latina/o and White Students in Utah and the Nation (p.30)	TABLE 9: Advanced Placement Exam Participation for Latina/o Students in Utah (p.27)
	TABLE 10: Comparison of SAT I (Reasoning) Test Takers and Mean Score by Student Group in Utah (p.28)
	TABLE 11: Average ACT Scores for Racial and Ethnic Groups, Utah 2005 (p.28)
	TABLE 12: Percent of Latina/o Teachers in Districts with Greatest Percentage of Latina/o Students (p.39)

Multiple educational achievement gaps pervade both the K-12 educational system as well as postsecondary education levels.

Executive Summary

The state of Utah is at an educational crossroads. At a time when diversity in Utah's communities and schools has increased to historically high levels, particularly among the Latina/o community, current federal mandates require greater state, district and school accountability for addressing gaps in performance. However, state-level reporting reveals that regardless of the indicator, gaps in access and outcomes exist overwhelmingly for students of color in Utah. As this analysis indicates, the state's educational, political, and business leadership are uniquely situated to respond to this challenge in ways that support districts, schools, leadership and teachers in their efforts to alter this current reality. In this paper, we argue that it is crucial that educational leaders, community advocates, and policymakers engage in analyzing, discussing, and proposing policy solutions that provide opportunities that equal the playing field for all its schoolchildren to succeed, particularly Latina/o children.

The paper is divided into two major sections. The first section describes the Utah political context, delineates the burgeoning Latina/o student populations across the state, and reports achievement gaps data. The second section of the paper argues for more effective leadership, a centering of a social justice culture and values, and calls for a comprehensive policy framework aimed at initiating a discourse amongst policymakers, educational and community leaders, and parents.

Currently, most districts in the state serve a more diverse student population. Student enrollment data clearly indicate that Utah's burgeoning Latina/o student population is not

relegated to the districts along the Wasatch front or in so-called urban school districts:

- Latina/o student enrollment increased from nearly 4% in 1980 to 11.47% in 2004 and 12.2 % in 2006.
- Fall 2004 enrollment data demonstrate that 32 of Utah's 40 school districts had increased Latina/o student populations since 2000.
- Latina/o students now make up at least 10% of the total student population in 13 school districts and at least 5% in 29 school districts.

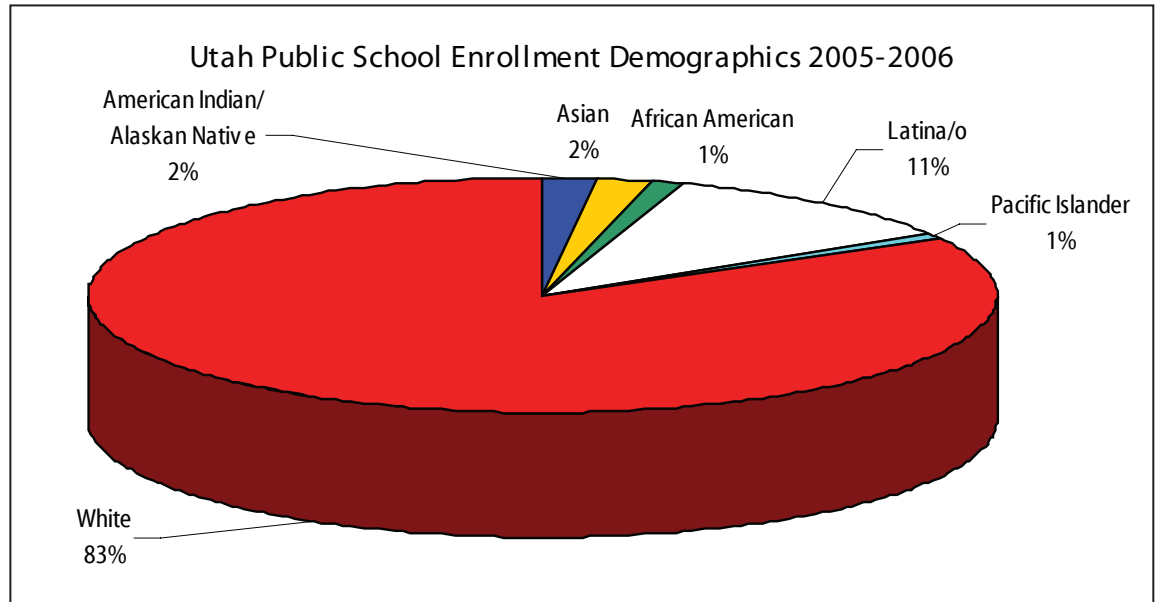
As student demographics shift, the multiple educational achievement gaps that pervade the K-12 educational system as well as postsecondary educational levels is more apparent. By extending beyond traditional conceptualizations of the "achievement gap" (i.e. standardized test scores), our view of the gaps provides a more accurate depiction of the lack of educational opportunities for Latina/o students in the state. In addition to criterion-referenced test scores, we consider data on advanced placement participation rates, dropout and graduation rates, and higher educational participation and attainment rates. Collectively, these data refute the notion that Latina/o students have systemic opportunities for success in Utah schools and that achievement gaps do not exist.

- Criterion-referenced tests
 - For 2004, the USOE reported that 50% of Latina/o students were proficient on the CRT Language Arts, 48% of Latina/o students were proficient in CRT mathematics and 29% of Latina/os were proficient in CRT science.
 - The proficiency levels of Latina/o students are most similar to that of their American Indian peers.

State-level reporting reveals that regardless of the indicator, gaps in access and outcomes exist overwhelmingly for students of color in Utah. The state's educational, political, and business leadership are uniquely situated to respond in ways that support districts, schools, leadership and teachers to alter this current reality.

By extending beyond traditional conceptualizations of the "achievement gap," our view of the gaps provides a more accurate depiction of the lack of educational opportunities for Latina/o students in the state.

FIGURE 1: Utah Public School Enrollment 2005-2006.
SOURCE: Utah State Office of Education.



- The widest gaps in performance exist between Latina/o students and White and Asian students. There was a 31% gap between the percent of Latina/o students' proficient in language arts and White students in 2004, 27% gap in mathematics, and 37% gap in science.

➤ **Utah Basic Skills Competency Test**

- UBSCCT passing rates for Latina/o students in the class of 2007 indicate that 60% have passed reading, 44% passed writing, and 37% passed mathematics.
- The gaps in cumulative pass rates are significant. There is 19% gap in passing rates between Latina/o students and their White peers in reading, 25% gap in writing, and 31% gap in mathematics for the class of 2006. For the class of 2007, the gaps are more striking with a 38% gap between pass rates in reading for Latina/o and White students, 33% gap in writing, and 35% in mathematics.
- According to preliminary data posted by the USOE, 33% of Latina/o students in the graduating class of 2006 had yet to pass the mathematics portion of UBSCCT after the spring 2006 administration, 13% had not passed

reading, and 26% had not passed the writing portion.

➤ **Advanced Placement Participation**

- The number of Latina/o students participating in this program remains well below that of their White peers, which mimics participation rates nationwide.

➤ **Dropout and Graduation Rates**

- Whether considering dropout, completion, or graduation rates, gaps exist for Latina/o students.
- NCES (2004) reported that the dropout rate for Latina/o students in grades 9-12 in Utah for the 2000-2001 school year was 9%.
- For the 2000-2001 time period, high school completers in Utah was reported as 60.8% for Latina/o students compared to 67.4% for American Indians and Alaskan Natives, 76.8% for Asian and Pacific Islanders, 61.2% for Blacks, and 84.9% for Whites.

➤ **Higher education enrollment**

- Using data from NCES, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) (2003) reported that less than 1% of the total enrolled students in post-secondary education in 1993 were Latina/o.
- White students represented 87% of the post-

For the 2004-2005 school year, 3.4% of students enrolled in Utah's higher education institutions were Latina/o, which is only up slightly from 3.1% in 2000-2001.

The notion that closing achievement gaps is at its core a moral issue of equity, social justice, and human rights must be endorsed.

secondary education enrollment in Utah in 1993 and 85% in 2003.

- For the 2004-2005 school year, 3.4% of students enrolled in Utah's higher education institutions were Latina/o, which is up slightly from 3.1% in 2000-2001. For the 2005-06 academic year, Latina/o students represented 4.1% of the total student population at the University of Utah.

Given the multiple, pervasive, and systemic achievement gaps that exist for Latina/o students in Utah, our intent is to initiate a discourse about Latina/o educational achievement at the macro-political or state policymaking level. In doing so, we suggest that broad systemic, institutional, and structural issues that maintain educational achievement gaps can be effectively addressed through providing progressive, critical and socially just leadership, embracing socially just values and culture, and addressing policy areas that target increasing access and outcomes.

➤ **Leadership.** Closing educational achievement gaps depends in large part on whether state and political leaders choose to exert the political will necessary to introduce, endorse, promote, and implement state legislation and policies to address this issue or whether debate and efforts are extinguished.

➤ **Political culture and values.** If the state is to benefit from a well-educated workforce and fully active citizenry, political and educational leadership will have to overcome its deficit notions of those that are different and, instead, commit to changing current educational practices and policies. The notion that closing achievement gaps is at its core a moral issue of equity, social justice, and human rights must be

endorsed.

➤ **State policy, practice, and reform.** Our conceptualization of what educational achievement gaps entail is much more holistic, broad, and comprehensive than generally accepted. Adopting this view requires that multiple, comprehensive, and strategic policy solutions be considered across K-12 and higher education, including implementing a state accountability system, addressing inequity and inadequacy in educational finance and funding, increasing the diversity among teachers and administrative leaders, ensuring the pipeline of students of color from K-12 into higher education institutions and creating a supportive environment, evaluating and reforming core curriculum, pedagogical practice, and other school and higher education factors to better serve marginalized students.

The existence of educational achievement gaps across K-12 and postsecondary educational settings is irrefutable. Equally evident is the increasingly anti-Latina/o environment created in part by legislative inaction in addressing inequities. The time has come for Utah's education, community, and business leaders to realize that the state's collective future is in the balance. We present a framework from which to begin a discussion and to spur progressive and aggressive action so that Utah's future is not clouded by outdated and ineffective educational policies and practices.

By outlining a broad framework for addressing existing gaps strategically, we move away from the predominant blame the victim mentality, refocusing our thinking and vision on what may be accomplished through comprehensive institutional and structural changes. While this paper serves to inform policymakers, administrators, and teachers of

While this paper serves to inform policymakers, administrators, and teachers of the pervasiveness of educational gaps for Latina/os and to outline strategic policy reform, we also seek to invite community activists, parents, and students to engage in the process.

Although progress may be made with individual policy or reform initiatives, evidence suggests what is needed is a coherent and comprehensive plan for eradicating achievement gaps.

We endorse the perspective that places value, respect, and appreciation for communities of color, their cultures, histories, languages, and perspectives, which add to the educational experience of all Utah students.

the pervasiveness of educational gaps for Latina/os and to outline strategic policy reform, we also seek to invite community activists, parents, and students to engage in the process. Through empowerment and advocacy, the voices and experiences of Latina/o communities, as well as other communities of color, can inform and influence changes in the educational system and the aforementioned policy areas in ways that are likely to better serve Latina/o students and their non-white counterparts.

Ultimately, for educational achievement gaps to be eliminated for Latina/o students, community mobilization, empowerment, and advocacy must be accompanied by

vision, commitment, and will of the state's political and institutional leadership for an educational system that ensures access and opportunity in unprecedented ways both in K-12 and higher education. Although progress may be made with individual policy or reform initiatives, evidence suggests what is needed is a coherent and comprehensive plan for eradicating achievement gaps. Thus, we call for the state to honor its obligation and responsibility to provide an equitable education for all children in Utah by initiating a policy discourse and framework, as suggested herein, that will allow the state to close educational achievement gaps.

The state's educational institutions must ensure that policies and practices are implemented so that an equal playing field is the goal.

Introduction

Diversity in Utah's communities and schools has increased to historically high levels, particularly among the Latina/o community. At the same time, more stringent federal requirements for state accountability and state-level reporting reveal that regardless of the indicator (e.g., performance, dropout, participation, or attainment in K-12 or higher education) gaps in access and outcomes exist for students of color. As a result, the state of Utah is at an educational crossroads. To address existing achievement gaps, the state's educational institutions must ensure that all children are provided opportunities for success and that policies and systems are implemented so that an equal playing field is the goal. The state's educational, political, and business leadership are uniquely situated to respond to this challenge in ways that support districts, schools, and teachers in their efforts to alter this current reality.

The costs of such gaps in educational access and opportunity include the nation and state's future economic viability (Kelly, 2005; Perlich, 2004). Clearly, economic arguments for closing the gaps are vital to drawing public attention to this issue. Particularly, when we consider that gaps in access and outcomes have significant implications for a state's economic engine and contribute to whether a state will have sufficient capabilities to compete in the national and international marketplace. However, there are other compelling reasons that are comparable. For instance, closing achievement gaps is at its core a moral issue of equity, social justice, and human rights. There are also quality of life issues at stake.

There are four assumptions, core beliefs, and/or facts
September 2006

upon which we base our discussion in this paper. First, many educational gaps exist and persist across the state, particularly for Latina/o communities. Next, by defining the gaps we do not endorse deficit views of these communities, meaning we do not "blame the victim" (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997) for the structural and institutional inequities that exist throughout public and higher educational systems. Rather, we endorse the perspective that places value, respect, and appreciation for communities of color, their cultures, histories, languages, and perspectives (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006), which add to the educational experience of all Utah students.¹ Valuing the diversity of the state requires a rejection of the types of notions exemplified by the following:

When I say predictors of academic failure I want to put it in the proper context, there is no single predictor of academic failure but when there are multiple factors at play in student's life that makes it more challenging for that student to achieve. For example, if the student is just Hispanic it doesn't necessarily predict that they will struggle academically. If they are just coming from a low-income family, it doesn't mean that they will struggle academically. If they are coming from a single-parent household, it doesn't mean that they will struggle academically. However, when you put three

The policy framework explained in this paper requires a shift in the location of responsibility for disrupting current trends in educational opportunities and outcomes from the students and their families to educational and supporting public institutions.

The shifting demographics of the region as a whole and of the state illustrate why continuing to ignore educational achievement gaps will only exacerbate the economic, social, and political divide within the state.

¹ Recognizing that the recent and increasing trends toward diversity enrich the lives of every student, we nonetheless recognize and embrace that Utah's history began with indigenous peoples who were residents of this land for many centuries, and that when the Mormon pioneers arrived in the land that would later become Utah, they were in fact entering Mexico. Their settlement in what was then the northern-most territories of Mexico, prior to the signing of Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ceded almost half of the nation to the U.S., could be considered an illegal encroachment into sovereign territory (Solórzano, 1998). This is significant given the current anti-immigrant sentiment that plays a prominent role in state level politics.

Representing the largest proportion of persons of color in the state, the Latina/o population in the state has more than doubled since 1990.

It is relevant and vital to consider how the current state educational system fails to provide opportunities for all its schoolchildren to succeed, particularly Latina/o children.

of those factors together, they could be an English Language Learner, or they could be the three that I mentioned—low-income, single-parent household, and Hispanic—it is likely that they will fail as a student. It is likely that they will drop-out as a student or they will certainly have low test scores and student achievement. (State Education Official, Education Interim Legislative Committee meeting, November 9, 2005)

Third, we recognize that valuing the diverse traditions, cultures, languages, and histories of our student population is central to any policy reform. Thus, unlike the deficit notions exemplified by the above quote, the policy framework explained in this paper requires a shift in the location of responsibility for disrupting current trends in educational opportunities and outcomes from the students and their families to educational and supporting public institutions. Fourth, institutional barriers have perpetuated achievement gaps across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status lines. Fifth, Utah's political and educational leadership have the capability and power to challenge existing policies and practices to close achievement gaps. In fact, statewide reform, higher levels of legislative commitment, and a focusing on a comprehensive plan to reform Utah educational systems have the potential to translate the state's failure to close achievement gaps into successes.

Consequently, in this paper we argue that it is relevant and vital to consider how the current state educational system fails to provide opportunities for all its schoolchildren to succeed, particularly Latina/o

children. First, we provide a context for education in Utah, including discussing demographic trends and historical events that shape Utah's political and economic landscape. Next, we present Utah school enrollment data and highlight emerging Latina/o populations in Utah counties and school districts. Third, we outline multiple educational achievement gaps that pervade both the K-12 educational system as well as postsecondary educational levels. This broader view of educational achievement gaps provides a more accurate depiction of the lack of educational opportunities for Latina/o students in the state by extending beyond traditional conceptualizations of the achievement gap. Although we provide traditional indicators of academic success such as standardized testing performance, we also consider data on participation rates, dropouts, and higher educational attainment. Finally, we propose an educational policy "road map" or framework for closing educational achievement gaps and providing equal access to educational opportunities. Perhaps most compelling to our argument is how this evidence of achievement gaps to date have highlighted "...how racial policy prejudice can be camouflaged as 'rational' policy choice" (Opfer, 2006, p.289).

Utah's Shifting Demographics

The shifting demographics in the region as a whole and in the state illustrate why continuing to ignore educational achievement gaps will only exacerbate the economic, social, and political divide. According to Ramirez and de la Cruz (2003), 44.3% of the Latina/o

Despite recurring negative depictions of incoming immigrants to Utah, this analysis indicates the direct economic value brought by new residents, and further highlights how recognizing the state's diversity will only serve to augment economic growth and enrich the state's societal landscape.

population in the U.S. now lives in the west.² The U.S. Census (2004) projects that there will be a 188% increase in the Latina/o population nationally from 2000-2050, increasing from 13% of the reported population in 2000 to 24% in 2050. Utah mirrors the nation with Latina/os being the largest and fastest growing population in the state. According to Perlich (2004), the percentage of non-White persons in the state did not exceed 2% until 1970 when the total was approximately 5%. She reports that the percentage of non-White Utah citizens is now 15% compared to over 30% nationwide. In 2000, the Latina/o population was estimated at 9% of the Utah population by the U.S. Census. In July 2004, the U.S. Census estimated the number of Latina/os in the state at 253,073 or 10.6% of the total state population. Representing the largest proportion of persons of color in the state currently, the Latina/o population has more than doubled since the 1990 U.S. Census.³

Perlich (2002, 2004) also provides census analyses that speak to increased immigration mostly from Mexico, which contributes to the shift in state demographics. Despite an increasingly negative environment towards immigrants, Perlich (2004) illustrates that the state's economic needs accounted for the upswing in immigration starting in the 1990s. She explains:

The economic boom of the 1990s in Utah was fueled in part by record level construction and the continued expansion of the tourism sector. In Utah, residential construction reached historic levels, facilities were constructed to prepare for the 2002 Winter Olympics, and the federal

government financed a \$1 billion interstate highway improvement project as well as light rail lines. (pp.7-8)

While the 2002 Winter Olympics hosted by Salt Lake City provided some impetus for the increased need for labor in the hospitality sector, Perlich (2004) noted that this growth was typical for the Intermountain West. According to her analyses, "Employment in Utah increased by roughly 35,000 jobs annually over the decade, which created labor shortages" (pp. 7-8). As a result, immigrants continued to serve the economic needs of the area, including diverting "labor shortages, bottlenecks, higher costs, and reduction in economic activity" (p. 13). She added, immigrants contributed to the economy as they helped "...to build highways, light rail, sports facilities, hotels, and residences and also to staff hotels and restaurants" (pp. 7-8). Again, Perlich's analysis indicates the direct economic value brought by new residents, and further highlights how recognizing the state's diversity will only serve to augment economic growth and enrich the state's societal landscape.

A shift in demographics, including an increasing immigrant population, reveals both diversity and current achievement gaps. Yet, we would like to be abundantly clear on a widely held misperception. The educational achievement gaps are not the result of the in-migration patterns. In fact, these gaps existed for Latina/o communities in Utah prior to the recent growth in diversity. The fact that most Latina/os in Utah are not foreign born should also raise questions about why the state's educational and political institutions have not historically served the needs of all its citizens.⁴

We would like to be abundantly clear on a widely held misperception. The educational achievement gaps are not the result of the in-migration patterns. These gaps existed for Latina/o communities in Utah prior to the recent growth in diversity. Moreover, they continue to persist despite the fact that most Utah Latina/os are not foreign born

In Utah, U.S. born, multi-generational Latina/os, Chicana/os, and Mexican Americans and other communities of color have and continue to seek equal opportunities in the K-12 and higher education arena.

² Thirty-five percent of Latina/os live in the South while 13% live in the Northeast and 8% live in the Midwest.

³ The 1990 U.S. Census reported that almost 5% of the population was Latina/o. September 2006

⁴ According to Perlich's (2004), the 2000 U.S. Census data indicate 87,883 foreign born Latina/os (p. 4). She also reports that total Utah Latina/o population was approximately 202,000 in that same year. This means that in 2000 approximately 44% of the Latina/os in Utah were foreign born while 56% were U.S. or native born.

State attempts to undermine and ignore NCLB provisions have resulted in a publicly fought campaign for state legitimacy.

While Utah's electorate provided President George W. Bush with the highest percentage of support among the states in the last general election, the state's leadership has consistently distanced itself from one of the President's key domestic policy issues—public school accountability.

Recently, the state's response to accountability was questioned again by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) when Utah's submission for participation in the federal growth model pilot

In Utah, U.S. born, multi-generational Latina/os, Chicana/os, and Mexican Americans and other communities of color have and continue to seek equal opportunities in the K-12 and higher education arena.⁵ For instance, in a 1979 Salt Lake Tribune news article, community activists Frank Cordova and Pete Suazo (who would later become a Utah State Senator), representing the Westside Concerned Parents Committee, were asked questions about Chicano high school dropouts, the dearth of teachers of color, and “whether the district (Salt Lake City School District) is providing Chicano children equal access to educational services.” Frank Cordova, who today is president of the Utah Coalition of La Raza (UCLR) stated, “The lack of Chicana/o educators has contributed seriously to the dropout and lower academic performance level of Chicana/o students in the Salt Lake City school system.” In a January 2000 *Salt Lake Tribune* news article, Archie Archuleta, then UCLR president, spoke to the issue of limited access to advanced placement courses for Latina/os: “Schools exclude them (Latina/os) without even thinking about it. They’ve just bought the idea that certain people are inferior.” These are just two examples of the how Chicano and Latina/o leaders have spoken out against the “educational gaps” that have existed for decades. Solórzano (2005) has also noted how Latina/o political organizations were active in addressing issues of high school dropouts, among other things. Unmistakably, it is not a new phenomenon to witness Latina/o and Chicana/o activists fighting for change through the political and educational systems.

Utah's Political Context

Utah generally touts high degrees of academic success on a variety of indicators. In spite of these depictions of success, differential access and opportunity in the state, as evidenced by performance on state and national assessments, dropout rates, and allocation of resources, are notably among the starkest in the country (Education Trust, 2004). Central to any analysis of existing and persistent educational achievement gaps is an understanding of how a state's political context shapes educational policies and practice. This is particularly relevant given the state's capacity yet reluctance to develop and implement educational policies to support closing the achievement gaps and to provide equal access and opportunities for all children.

Utah has the distinction of being the “reddest of the red” states.⁶ While Utah's electorate provided President George W. Bush with the highest percentage of support among the states in the last general election, the state's leadership has consistently distanced itself from one of the President's key domestic policy issues—public school accountability. In Utah, the most notable and persistent political conflict around education has arisen over the question of constitutionality of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001, commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and the power of the federal government to stipulate parameters for state educational policy. The conflict has centered on the federal government's requirement for state-level accountability consistent with provisions authorized in NCLB, particularly the goal of having all students be proficient

6 See Federal Election Commission website at <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/2004presgenresults.pdf> for 2004 General Election results indicating that 73.5% of the Utah electorate voted for George W. Bush.

5 See Solórzano (1998, 2005)

by 2013-14 and accountability for schools and districts based on student group performance and additional indicators. Although contested by some, NCLB's strong accountability provisions are touted as leverage for closing achievement gaps. The explicit and implicit goals and (lack of) federal resources appropriated for the implementation of NCLB have consistently spurred similar complaints (McNeil, 2000; Valenzuela, 2004), particularly in the state of Utah.

Despite some of the most pervasive evidence of inequities in its educational system, Utah's leadership has attempted to re-frame the political and policy debate in two ways. First, achievement gaps have been portrayed as minimal, closing, or a non-issue. Second, the state has claimed state's rights as its central premise for abdicating NCLB. During the height of its state's rights argument, the state's legislative leadership in an unprecedented move passed legislation (House Bill 1001) during the 2005 Special Session that stipulated that state priorities and goals, however defined, trump federal priorities and goals.⁷ By claiming state's rights and dismissing many of the NCLB requirements, the state continues its bid to avoid authentic, public accountability for the performance of its districts and schools and the achievement of all of its students.⁸ Recently, the state's response to accountability was questioned again by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) when Utah's submission for participation in the federal growth model pilot was rejected. According to the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the state's growth model was rejected due to three reasons: 1) not having a plan

that has 100% of students proficient by 2013-14; 2) progress not based on a combination of performance on reading, math and other indicators; and 3) not disaggregating data and instead aggregating the scores of all students of color, students eligible for free and reduced lunch, and English language learners. All of these provisions are required by NCLB.

State attempts to undermine and ignore NCLB provisions have resulted in a public campaign for state legitimacy and relevance; it poses an on-going threat to current federally funded programs such as Title I. The state's minimal compliance stance has for the moment maintained federal funding for the state's educational programs. Obviously, the loss of federal funding would be devastating to some districts, many schools, and thousands of children.

In Utah, providing equitable access and opportunities for Latina/o families generally and new immigrants in particular, remains difficult in the current political context. What is occurring in Utah is similar to what is happening on the national front. Policies have become increasingly unfriendly and unwelcoming to immigrants and undocumented citizens even as the state's and nation's growing economies need the labor associated with these communities. For instance, in the 2006 legislative session, three bills (HB 7, HB 64, and HB 179) illustrated the growing unwelcoming climate for immigrants in Utah. HB 7, which was defeated, would have repealed the in-state tuition currently offered to a selected number of students who are undocumented immigrants but have spent at least three years prior to graduation in Utah's public schools. The following description of recently challenged legislation given at a House Public Education Committee meeting captures the perspective of some towards students who are immigrants.

I hate this bill and I hate this issue (on repealing HB 7, in-

By claiming state's rights and dismissing many of the NCLB requirements, the state continues its bid to avoid authentic, public accountability for the performance of its districts and schools and the achievement of all of its students.

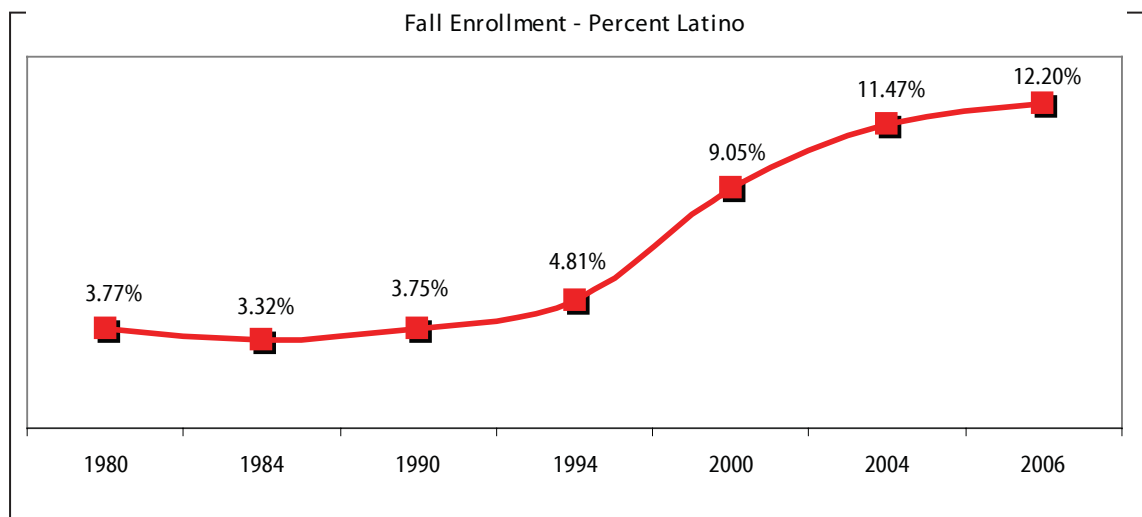
Policies have become increasingly unfriendly and unwelcoming to immigrants and undocumented citizens even as the state's and nation's growing economies need the labor associated with these communities. For instance, in the 2006 legislative session, three bills (HB 7, HB 64, and HB 179) illustrated the growing unwelcoming climate

7 From *Deseret Morning News* (Feb. 16, 2005, written by Toomer-Cook): "We want to send a message to those in the federal government that Utah has a great education system and that we know best how to manage that education system," (Rep. Cory) Holdaway told Utah House members. Also quoted was State Superintendent Patty Harrington, who said, "This [meaning requiring NCLB mandates] is federal intrusion. The state runs public schools. My accountability is to the State Board of Education, the state Legislature and the governor. I shouldn't have the additional piece of the federal government on top of that."

8 From the *Daily Herald* (Apr. 19, 2005, written by Jennifer Dobner): "I just regret that the department again is making threatening moves to the state," Harrington said. "My personal belief is that NCLB usurps state's rights and all Utah is doing is reasserting those rights." September 2006

Latina/o student achievement and postsecondary success is strongly correlated to middle and high school experiences.

FIGURE 2: Percent Latina/o Enrollment. SOURCE: Utah State Office of Education (USOE), Division of Finance Statistics.



state tuition for undocumented college students who meet Utah residency and college/university admissions requirements). I hate that the federal government has forced us once again into an impossible box. However, I am persuaded that America is not the land of opportunity for those who come here illegally. It is absolutely the land of opportunity for everyone who is here legally...America is not the land of opportunity for illegal aliens. Their only solution can be when they turn 18 that they return to their country and then they make application to enter here legally. And that is the only thing they can do to embrace the "American Dream." Because we've figured out that by giving them in state tuition that we don't even turn the key for them to live the "American Dream." We educate them. We prepare them to be doctors, lawyers, executives. We prepare them to be all kinds of things. Except that they can't work here. And maybe the value of the education goes beyond just the job. But I think it would be pretty miserable to be a highly educated doctor and have to clean houses. (House Public Education Committee,

January 2006)

HB 64, which was also defeated, would have repealed the driving-privilege card provision (SB 227) passed in the 2005 legislative session. The driving-privilege card permits undocumented immigrants to drive but doesn't provide a driver's license. HB 179, which was also defeated, would have required employers to verify employment eligibility of new hires with the Department of Homeland Security.

Growing anti-immigrant and anti-Latina/o sentiment seeks to paint a deficit, "blame the victim" picture of academic failure. The resulting legislative bills signal a strategic and incremental policy movement that seeks to codify anti-immigrant and anti-Latina/o policy. These policy initiatives, similar to this state's opposition to accountability, move the state further from addressing the educational achievement gaps. As mentioned previously, the majority of Latina/os in Utah are native born. New immigrants pose increased opportunities to public schools, but they are not to blame for achievement gaps.

In the following discussion, we turn our attention to

September 2006

describing Utah public schools and the Latina/o demographics. This will be followed by a discussion of achievement gaps that persist through public and higher educational systems.

Utah Public Schools: An Overview of Education for Latina/o Students

As Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis (2005) reported, “Often, low school performance among [Latina/o] students did not begin in the ninth grade, it is the result of a steady decline following a poor school experience during the foundational elementary and middle school years” (p. 32). In their three-part series titled, “Latina/o students and the educational pipeline,” the Educational Policy Institute (Swail et al., 2005) similarly finds that Latina/o student achievement and postsecondary success is strongly correlated to middle and high school experiences and opportunities. As the following data indicate, differential performance between Latina/os and their peers is not isolated to any one indicator or to the K-12 setting.

Here, we primarily present data on performance indicators that are currently available. We recognize that these data are only a fraction of the types of data necessary to fully disclose the differential educational opportunities afforded to students of color in the state. In order to more fully reveal the nature of educational experiences afforded to Latina/o children and young adults, analysis of a more complete set of indicators are necessary. For instance, additional data are needed to explore indicators that measure school climate, funding, available programs and participation, and teacher and school quality.

Again, we urge those debating the pervasive gaps in education to focus and to reject the notion that these gaps are a new phenomenon, one attributed to new immigrants or those who are English Language Learners, or the students

whose performance we are reporting. Instead, consider how these gaps are a continuance of the historical effects of schooling felt by U.S. born communities of color, within Utah and around the country, and what policy remedies may eliminate these gaps.⁹

Latina/o Enrollment

Public school enrollment in Utah increased 14,330 students from 2004-05 to 2005-06, according to the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). Perlich (2003) notes that the total enrollment in Utah’s public schools will increase significantly between 2004 and 2020 as a result of an “echo boom.” Counties in the state likely to experience the highest growth include Salt Lake, Utah, and Washington counties, whom she estimates will experience approximately 130% growth before 2030. While the percent of students who are African American, American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander remained constant from 2004-05 to 2005-06, the percent of White students declined while the percent of Latina/o students increased (See Figures 1 and 2). According to the USOE, Latina/o student enrollment had increased from nearly 4% in 1980 to 12.2% in 2006. As demonstrated earlier, much of the rapid growth occurred in the 1990s when economic forces pulled immigrant communities to Utah, according to Perlich (2004).

District-level demographic data

One of the widely held perceptions on student population growth is that Latina/o student growth is relegated to “urban” districts (Buendia, 2006). This is simply not the case. The wide majority of school districts in the state

We urge those debating the pervasive gaps in education to focus and to reject the notion that these gaps are a new phenomenon, one attributed to new immigrants or those who are English Language Learners or the students whose performance we are reporting.

Since 1990, 25 of Utah’s school districts experienced at least a triple-digit increase in Latina/o student population and at least 29 of the school districts experienced at least a 195% increase in Latina/o student population since 1980.

⁹ Achievement gaps have historically affected Native American, African American and Latina/o communities as evidenced by the research conducted and scholarship published by such scholars as Villalpando (2006), Valencia (2002), Valenzuela (1999), Bell (2004), Deyhle (1983, 1995), Orfield (2001), and San Miguel (1987).

TABLE 1. FALL ENROLLMENT AND LATINA/O PERCENTAGE INCREASE

District	Latina/o Fall Enrollment				2004 Percent Change		
	1980	1990	2000	2004	Since 1980	Since 1990	Since 2000
Sevier	33	50	31	133	303.03%	166.00%	329.03%
Piute	0	4	13	37	N/A	825.00%	184.62%
Wasatch	12	28	172	432	3500.00%	1442.86%	151.16%
Rich	4	0	5	12	200.00%	N/A	140.00%
No. Summit	10	7	31	67	570.00%	857.14%	116.13%
So. Summit	1	3	32	68	6700.00%	2166.67%	112.50%
Beaver	9	27	79	155	1622.22%	474.07%	96.20%
Washington	61	125	937	1,774	2808.20%	1319.20%	89.33%
Nebo	184	270	970	1,591	764.67%	489.26%	64.02%
Iron	50	48	315	493	886.00%	927.08%	56.51%
Logan	52	147	693	1,070	1957.69%	627.89%	54.40%
Alpine	255	703	2,474	3,641	1327.84%	417.92%	47.17%
Juab	0	2	27	39	N/A	1850.00%	44.44%
Granite	2,373	3,148	9,953	14,061	492.54%	346.66%	41.27%
Jordan	1,407	1,955	3,499	4,855	245.06%	148.34%	38.75%
Park City	2	24	343	470	23400.00%	1858.33%	37.03%
Davis	1,179	1,173	2,602	3,559	201.87%	203.41%	36.78%
Provo	272	470	2,071	2,826	938.97%	501.28%	36.46%
Cache	37	156	633	862	2229.73%	452.56%	36.18%
Millard	40	86	263	345	762.50%	301.16%	31.18%
Weber	517	717	1,550	2,014	289.56%	180.89%	29.94%
Murray	158	223	557	718	354.43%	221.97%	28.90%
Grand	57	69	90	116	103.51%	68.12%	28.89%
Ogden	1,740	1,735	4,271	5,288	203.91%	204.78%	23.81%
Box Elder	386	378	719	873	126.17%	130.95%	21.42%
So. Sanpete	15	57	187	221	1373.33%	287.72%	18.18%
Salt Lake	2,619	2,876	6,992	8,197	212.98%	185.01%	17.23%
Tooele	610	665	992	1,140	86.89%	71.43%	14.92%
Duchesne	52	61	112	124	138.46%	103.28%	10.71%
No. Sanpete	10	66	206	227	2170.00%	243.94%	10.19%
Emery	30	27	121	132	340.00%	388.89%	9.09%
Uintah	61	99	172	180	195.08%	81.82%	4.65%
Tintic	4	0	7	7	75.00%	N/A	0.00%
Garfield	8	6	52	48	500.00%	700.00%	-7.69%
Carbon	582	516	447	399	-31.44%	-22.67%	-10.74%
Morgan	7	26	34	29	314.29%	11.54%	-14.71%
Kane	3	28	43	36	1100.00%	28.57%	-16.28%
San Juan	93	83	89	74	-20.43%	-10.84%	-16.85%
Daggett	0	0	6	4	N/A	N/A	-33.33%
Wayne	3	2	31	4	33.33%	100.00%	-87.10%
TOTAL	12,936	16,060	41,821	56,321	335.38%	250.69%	34.67%

TABLE 2. SEVEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH 75% OF LATINA/O STUDENT POPULATION

District	Fall 2004 Latina/o State %	Fall 2004 Latina/o Enrollment	Cumulative Latina/o Total	% of Cumulative
<i>Granite</i>	24.74%	14,061	14,061	24.97%
<i>Salt Lake</i>	14.42%	8,197	22,258	39.52%
<i>Ogden</i>	9.30%	5,288	27,546	48.91%
<i>Jordan</i>	8.54%	4,855	32,401	57.53%
<i>Alpine</i>	6.41%	3,641	36,042	63.99%
<i>Davis</i>	6.26%	3,559	39,601	70.31%
<i>Provo</i>	4.97%	2,826	42,427	75.33%

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION (USOE), DIVISION OF FINANCE STATISTICS

When we consider the enrollment percentage changes since 1980 and 1990, even fewer districts had decreases in their Latina/o student populations.

have seen growth in Latina/o student population, many of them having experienced rapid growth of this student group. The USOE fall 2004 enrollment data in Table 1 demonstrate that 32 of Utah's 40 school districts have had increased Latina/o student populations since 2000. Overall, the state has had a 335% increase in Latina/o student population since 1980. The district with the highest increase since 2000 is the Sevier School District, which had an increase of 329.03% since the fall 2000 enrollment collections. A majority of the districts had double-digit increases including those districts which educate the majority of Utah students.

When we consider the enrollment percentage changes since 1980 and 1990, even fewer districts had decreases in their Latina/o student populations. Only two districts—

Carbon and San Juan School Districts—experienced a decrease in the percentage of Latina/o students since either the student enrollment calculations of 1980 and 1990. Every other district experienced at least a double-digit increase in the percent of Latina/o students. Since 1990, 25 of the school districts experienced at least a triple-digit increase in Latina/o student population and at least 29 of the school districts experienced at least a 195% increase in Latina/o student population since 1980. Of the 38 districts that had increases since 1990, the smallest percentage increase was experienced by Morgan School District, which had a 11.54% increase while the largest percentage increase was experienced by South Summit School District, which had a 2166.67% increase.

The three districts with the highest number of Latina/o students represent almost 50% of the total Latina/o student population in the state.

TABLE 3: LATINA/O STUDENT ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL DISTRICT STUDENT ENROLLMENT, FALL 2004

District	% Latina/o Enrollment Fall 2004	District	% Latina/o Enrollment Fall 2004	District	% Latina/o Enrollment Fall 2004	District	% Latina/o Enrollment Fall 2004
<i>Ogden</i>	41.69%	Wasatch	10.44%	No. Summit	6.80%	Duchesne	3.18%
<i>Salt Lake</i>	34.74%	Tooele	10.33%	Cache	6.44%	Sevier	3.09%
<i>Provo</i>	21.15%	Beaver	10.28%	Jordan	6.41%	Kane	3.01%
<i>Granite</i>	20.51%	No. Sanpete	9.81%	Nebo	6.39%	Daggett	2.94%
<i>Logan</i>	18.38%	Box Elder	8.27%	Iron	6.33%	Rich	2.80%
<i>Millard</i>	11.67%	Washington	8.22%	Davis	5.87%	Tintic	2.67%
<i>Carbon</i>	11.44%	Grand	8.18%	Emery	5.58%	San Juan	2.50%
<i>Park City</i>	11.16%	So. Sanpete	8.07%	So. Summit	5.14%	Juab	1.99%
<i>Murray</i>	11.06%	Weber	7.06%	Garfield	5.07%	Morgan	1.47%
<i>Piute</i>	10.72%	Alpine	6.89%	Uintah	3.19%	Wayne	0.77%

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION (USOE), DIVISION OF FINANCE STATISTICS
September 2006

Utah has raised White students to the proficient level on CRT's, but has not been similarly successful with Latina/o students.

The student enrollment data clearly indicate that Utah's burgeoning Latina/o student population is not relegated to the districts along the Wasatch front or in so-called urban school districts.

Majority of Utah Latina/os are educated in seven school districts

As Table 2 illustrates, an overwhelming majority—75%—of Latina/o public school children attend seven school districts along the Wasatch front. The three districts with the highest number of Latina/o students (Granite, Salt Lake, and Ogden) represent almost 50% of the total Latina/o student population in the state.

The current percentage of Latina/os in individual districts is further evidence of the diversification of total student population. For instance, Ogden School District has the highest number of Latina/o students (42%) as a percentage of their total student population, followed by Salt Lake School District (35%), Provo School District (21%), Granite School District (21%), and Logan School District (18%).

Although the previously named districts have more of the Latina/o student population, almost all districts serve a diverse student population. For instance, Latina/o students now make up at least 10% of the total student population in 13 school districts and at least 5% in 29 school districts. Only 11 of Utah's 40 school districts have a total Latina/o student population of less than 5%.

Current Performance Indicators

Utah has been cited by local and national media, education foundations, and researchers as having one of the most underdeveloped state accountability systems (see Education Trust, 2004; Lynn, 2005). These criticisms are contrary to the state's contentions of an advanced

accountability system¹⁰ and education system—systems claimed to be producing adequate outcomes with all children.

As we illustrate, evidence suggests that Utah ranks among the worst nationally in performance on state and national tests, a fact highlighted by existing achievement gaps between the state's White students and students of color. As evidenced in the data on assessments, the disaggregation of data is imperative to understanding the existence and extent of achievement gaps in the state.

Moreover, beyond the local arena, the Utah state educational system is criticized for failing to implement strategies or educational policies aimed at closing educational achievement gaps that persist (Sanderson, 2005; Education Trust, 2004). In 2003, Education Trust reported that while Utah had made progress in raising the performance of White students to the proficient level, the state had not been similarly successful with Latina/o students.

Criterion Referenced Tests

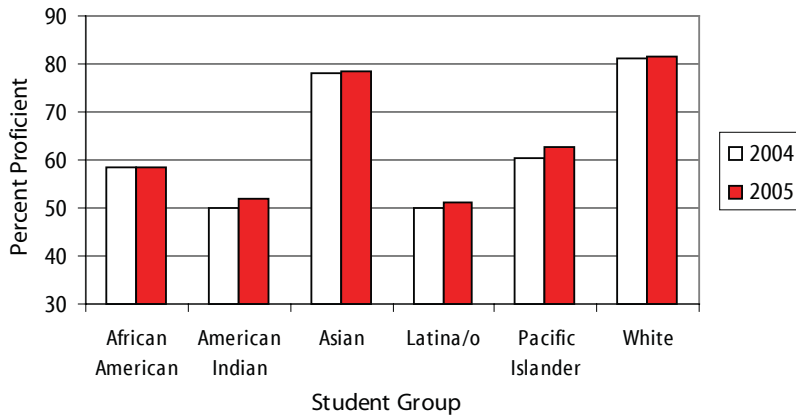
Each year, the state administers criterion-referenced tests, which are commonly referred to as CRTs, in grades 1 through 11. These tests were designed to evaluate student performance on the state's standards in language arts, mathematics, and science.

For 2004, the USOE reported that 50% of Latina/o students were proficient on the CRT Language Arts, 48% of Latina/o students were proficient in CRT mathematics and 29% of Latina/os were proficient in CRT science. The proficiency levels of Latina/o students is most similar to that of their American Indian peers. The widest gaps in

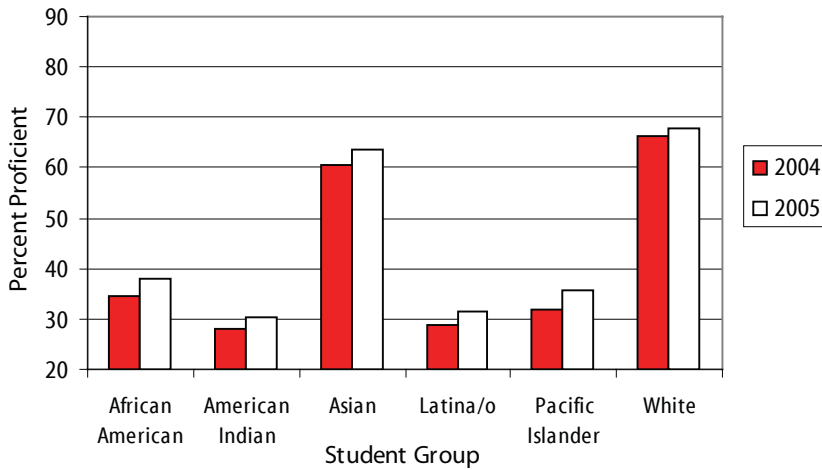
¹⁰ We contend that the state has a reporting system not an accountability system.

The proficiency levels of Latina/o students is most similar to that of their American Indian peers. The widest gaps in performance exist between Latina/o students and White and Asian students.

Student Group Proficiency in Language Arts CRT
2004 & 2005, All Grades



Student Group Proficiency in Science CRT
2004 & 2005, All Grades



Student Group Proficiency in Mathematics CRT
2004 & 2005, All Grades

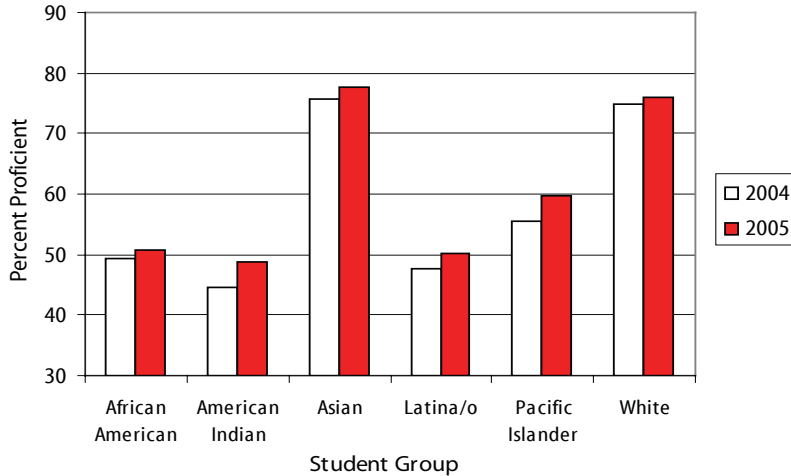


FIGURE 3. Student Group Proficiency in Language Arts CRT for 2004 and 2005 for All Grades. FIGURE 4. Student Group Proficiency in Science CRT for 2004 and 2005 for All Grades. FIGURE 5. Student Group Proficiency in Mathematics CRT for 2004 and 2005 for All Grades. SOURCE: Utah State Office of Education (USOE).

The 2005 CRT's showed 30% more White students were proficient in language arts than Latina/o students; 26% more White students were proficient in mathematics than Latina/o students, and 37% more Whites were proficient in science than Latina/o students.

TABLE 4: 2004 LANGUAGE ARTS, MATHEMATICS, AND SCIENCE CRT PERCENT PROFICIENT, ALL GRADES

Student Group	Lang. Arts		Math		Science	
	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient
African American	4,628	58.58	4,307	49.45	2,999	34.61
American Indian	6,324	49.98	5,761	44.65	4,407	28.02
Asian	6,581	78	5,562	75.62	4,632	60.4
Latina/o	44,648	49.86	41,824	47.65	28,751	28.81
Pacific Islander	5,330	60.3	4,878	55.56	3,680	31.98
White	333,824	80.99	286,643	74.81	223,236	66.15

Despite an increase in the percent of students who are proficient on the CRTs in 2005, the gap between student groups persists.

TABLE 5: 2005 LANGUAGE ARTS, MATHEMATICS, AND SCIENCE CRT PERCENT PROFICIENT, ALL GRADES

Student Group	Lang. Arts		Math		Science	
	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient	Total # Students Tested	% Proficient
African American	5,152	58.54	4,696	50.85	3,333	38.1
American Indian	6,414	51.79	5,766	48.68	4,353	30.3
Asian	6,809	78.44	5,682	77.63	4,751	63.5
Latina/o	48,665	50.97	44,802	50.18	30,992	31.3
Pacific Islander	5,701	62.53	5,120	59.61	4,353	35.5
White	338,786	81.45	292,322	76.06	225,562	67.9

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION (USOE), 2004 & 2005 CRT RESULTS. *At the present, we are not able to access individual-level student data for our analysis. Thus, we must use secondary data provided by the Utah State Office of Education.*

Although the USOE (2005) reported that “Utah students again scored above average on a nationally norm-referenced test (NRT)” (¶ 1), this statement masks the wide disparities in achievement among student groups.

performance exist between Latina/o students and White and Asian students. For instance, there was a 31% gap between the percent of Latina/o students proficient in language arts and White students in 2004, 27% gap in mathematics, and 37% gap in science.

As the results from 2005 indicate, the percent of Latina/o students who are proficient has increased slightly over 2004, proficiency among Latina/o students remains below their peer groups with the exception of American Indian students in mathematics and science. Despite an increase in the percent of students who are proficient on the CRTs in 2005, the gap between student groups persists. For example, 30% more White students were proficient in language arts than Latina/o students, 26% more White students were proficient in mathematics than Latina/o students, and 37% more Whites were proficient in science than Latina/o students.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 illustrate how dramatic the gaps are between students of color and their White and Asian peers in language arts, mathematics, and science CRTs. Tables 4 and 5 provide a further comparison of Latina/o students to the peer student groups for 2004 and 2005. The Latina/o percent proficient across subject areas is highlighted.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Iowa Test of Educational Development

Although the USOE (2005) reported that “Utah students again scored above average on a nationally norm-referenced test (NRT)” (¶ 1), this statement masks the wide disparities in achievement among student groups. This statement seeks to portray an image of performance of students statewide without scrutinizing how various student groups fared on the

For the graduating class of 2007, students identified as English language learners increased by over 700 students.

test. In general, the USOE's report on the IOWA performance does not highlight the vast differences in percentile rank among student groups in its analysis.

According to data released by the USOE, the percentile rank for Latina/o students in grade 3 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) core total—reading, language, and mathematics—was 38th in 2005. This means, that 62% of students nationwide in grade 3 scored above Utah Latina/o 3rd graders on the core total. Similarly, Latina/o students' percentile rank for the total composite, which includes reading language, mathematics, social studies and science, was 43rd. Latina/o students' core total percentile rank is slightly above American Indian students (39th percentile), but below African American students (45th percentile), and Pacific Islander students (48th percentile) compared to White students (62nd percentile) and Asian students (64th percentile).

In grade 5, Latina/o students' core total percentile rank was 35th whereas their total composite percentile rank was 38th. Comparatively, the core total percentile rank for Latina/o 5th graders in Utah is again below that of their peers-- American Indian students (39th percentile), African American and Pacific Islander students (45th percentile), and White (63rd percentile) and Asian students (65th percentile).

In grade 8, Latina/o students' core total percentile rank was 35th whereas their total composite percentile rank was 36th. Comparatively, the core total percentile rank for Latina/o eighth graders in Utah is slightly above their American Indian peers (34th percentile) and below their African American (40th percentile), Pacific Islander (45th percentile), White (60th percentile) and Asian (65th percentile) peers.

On the grade 11 Iowa Test of Educational

Development, the percentile rank for Latina/o students on the core—which is comprised of reading, vocabulary, reading comprehension, spelling, revising writing, mathematics, concepts and problem solving, and computation—was 37th. The percentile rank for Latina/o students on the composite—core areas plus social studies and science—was 38th. The percentile rank for Latina/o students was slightly above on the core areas their American Indian peers who ranked in the 35th percentile, while below their African American (39th percentile), Pacific Islander (42nd percentile), White (62nd percentile), and Asian (63rd percentile) peers.

Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT)

Beginning with the graduating class of 2006, students must pass the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT), including all three subtests—mathematics, reading, and writing. Students who successfully complete all state and district course requirements yet do not pass all three components of the UBSCT are not eligible for a Basic High School Diploma. Unfortunately, we know little about how the differentiated diplomas will be implemented, including how post-secondary institutions or prospective employers who “require a high school diploma” will view this information.

Table 6 and Table 7 provide the class of 2006 and class of 2007 UBSCT data by student group. For the graduating class of 2006, the USOE reported that 3,479 Latina/o students were enrolled in public schools in October 2003 compared to 3,198 as of the October 2005 enrollment calculations. In the same time period, students identified as English language learners decreased between fall 2003 and fall 2004

Students who successfully complete all state and district course requirements yet do not pass all three components of the UBSCT are not eligible for a Basic High School Diploma.

Unfortunately, no data exists on how the differentiated diplomas will be implemented, including how post-secondary institutions or prospective employers who “require a high school diploma” will view this information.

TABLE 6: CLASS OF 2006 CUMULATIVE UBSCT PERFORMANCE FOR ALL STUDENT GROUPS, FALL 2005+

Student group	Oct 05 Enroll.	% Oct 2005 Enroll. for Class of 2007	Math		Reading		Writing	
			% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass	% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass	% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass
<i>African American</i>	397	1%	35%	53%	63%	27%	46%	40%
<i>American Indian</i>	606	2%	37%	51%	66%	22%	47%	38%
<i>Asian</i>	651	2%	73%	19%	80%	12%	72%	18%
<i>Latina/o</i>	3,693	10%	37%	52%	60%	29%	44%	43%
<i>Pacific Islander</i>	471	1%	51%	38%	69%	19%	60%	26%
<i>White</i>	30,949	84%	72%	19%	88%	7%	77%	13%
<i>ELL (A-E Combined)</i>	3,537	10%	34%	58%	50%	42%	38%	52%
<i>Not ELL</i>	33,326	90%	71%	19%	88%	6%	76%	13%
<i>Students with Disabilities</i>	3,269	9%	18%	70%	48%	41%	22%	64%
<i>Students without Disabilities</i>	33,594	91%	73%	18%	88%	6%	78%	12%
<i>Econ. Disadvan.</i>	9,369	25%	55%	35%	79%	13%	61%	26%
<i>Not Econ. Disadvan.</i>	27,494	75%	72%	19%	86%	8%	77%	14%
<i>Migrant</i>	152	0.40%	36%	54%	57%	37%	37%	53%
<i>Not-migrant</i>	36,711	99.6%	68%	23%	85%	9%	73%	17%

We can determine that an increased number of students will receive either an alternative completion diploma or a certificate of completion depending on which conditions of the state rule have been met.

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION. + *These data were not available at the individual student level. Thus, we cannot discern which students have not tested at all or which cohort of students is consistently represented in these data.*

then increased between fall 2004 and fall 2005 enrollment. According to the USOE's data, an additional 890 students in the graduating class of 2006 have been identified as students with disabilities between the October 1, 2003 enrollment calculation and October 1, 2005 enrollment calculation. The Utah State Board of Education with R277-705-4 ruled that school districts or schools shall both award diplomas and completion certificates and provide differentiated diplomas.

This ruling permits districts to award students identified with disabilities who have Individual Education Plans an

alternative completion diplomas. Data are not accessible to discern the student characteristics (e.g., race and ethnicity, ELL status, economic status) of those identified during this period for special education services. We can determine that an increased number of students will receive either an alternative completion diploma or a certificate of completion depending on which conditions of the state rule have been met.

For the graduating class of 2007, 3,795 Latina/o students were enrolled in October 2004 compared to 3,693 in October

TABLE 7: CLASS OF 2007 CUMULATIVE UBSCT PERFORMANCE FOR ALL STUDENT GROUPS, FALL 2005+

Student group	Oct 05 Enroll.	% Oct 2005 Enroll. for Class of 2007	Math		Reading		Writing	
			% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass	% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass	% Previously Passed	% Remaining to Pass
African American	397	1%	35%	53%	63%	27%	46%	40%
American Indian	606	2%	37%	51%	66%	22%	47%	38%
Asian	651	2%	73%	19%	80%	12%	72%	18%
Latina/o	3,693	10%	37%	52%	60%	29%	44%	43%
Pacific Islander	471	1%	51%	38%	69%	19%	60%	26%
White	30,949	84%	72%	19%	88%	7%	77%	13%
ELL (A-E Combined)	3,537	10%	34%	58%	50%	42%	38%	52%
Not ELL	33,326	90%	71%	19%	88%	6%	76%	13%
Students with Disabilities	3,269	9%	18%	70%	48%	41%	22%	64%
Students without Disabilities	33,594	91%	73%	18%	88%	6%	78%	12%
Econ. Disadvan.	9,369	25%	55%	35%	79%	13%	61%	26%
Not Econ. Disadvan.	27,494	75%	72%	19%	86%	8%	77%	14%
Migrant	152	0.40%	36%	54%	57%	37%	37%	53%
Not-migrant	36,711	99.6%	68%	23%	85%	9%	73%	17%

Overall, we see that the cumulative passing rates on UBSCT for Latina/o students is below that of their peers for the Class of 2006 and 2007.

Passing rates for Utah's White students across all subject areas is greater than that of all of their peer groups for the class of 2006.

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION. + These data were not available at the individual student level. Thus, we cannot discern which students have not tested at all or which cohort of students is consistently represented in these data.

2005. In the same time period, students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) has increased by 731 students for the 2007 graduating class—from 2,796 to 3,527. Contrary to the class of 2006, thus far, enrollment of students with disabilities is down by seven students for the class of 2007. Table 6 and Table 7 provide data on the graduating class of 2006 and class of 2007 respectively.

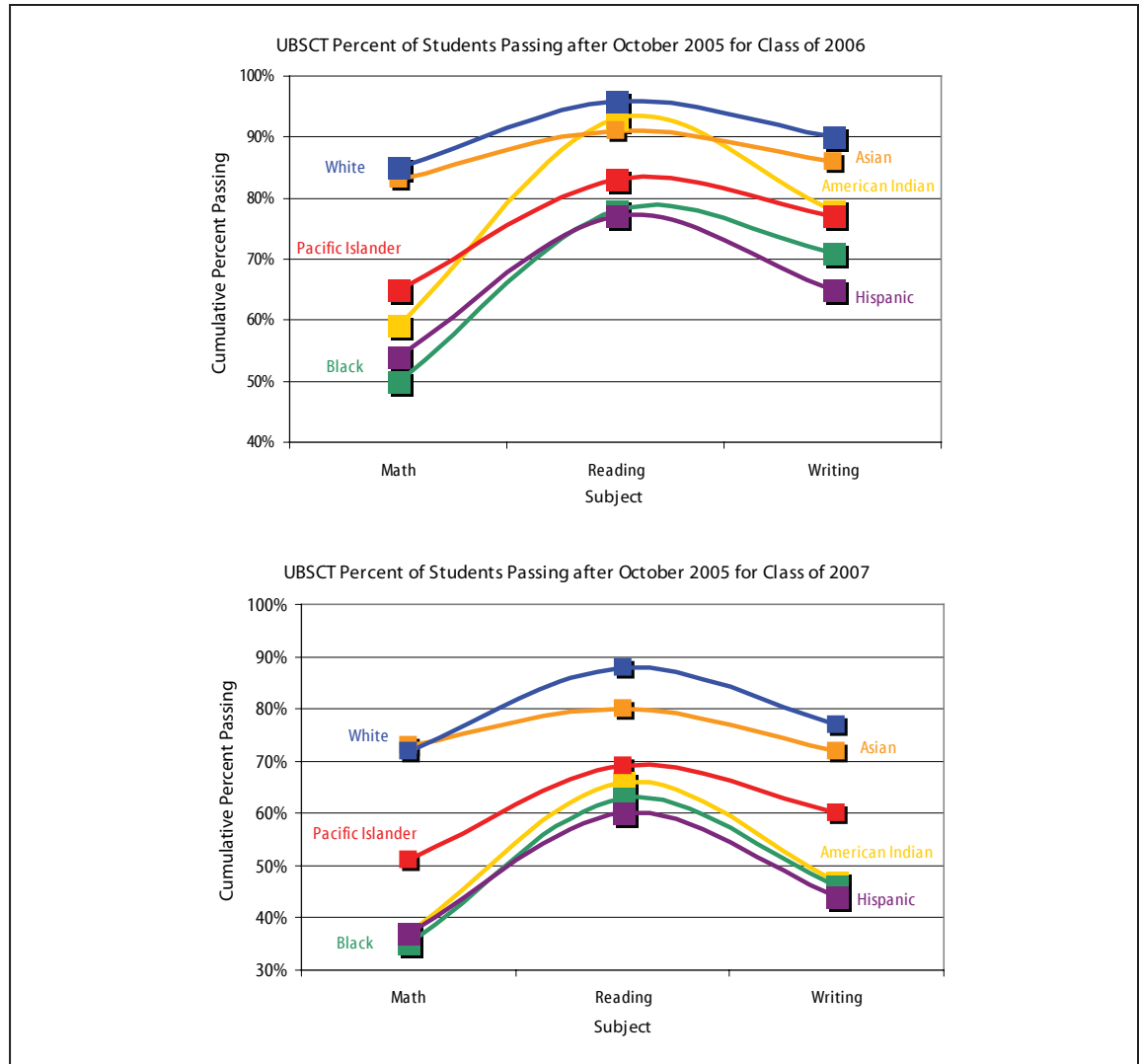
According to USOE data, more Latina/o students in the graduating class of 2006 have passed reading (77%) than writing (65%) or mathematics (54%) to date. Passing rates for

Latina/o students in the class of 2007 mimic this pattern with 60% passing reading, 44% passing writing, and 37% passing mathematics. Overall, we see that the cumulative passing rates on UBSCT for Latina/o students is below that of their peers for the class of 2006 and 2007. Passing rates for White students across all subject areas is greater than that of all of their peer groups for the class of 2006. The exception to this is the cumulative pass rates in mathematics where the pass rates for African American students is below that of all of their peers for both graduating classes. The gaps in cumulative pass

A smaller percentage of Latina/o students were enrolled in English, mathematics, and science AP courses.

FIGURE 6. UBSCT Percent of Students Passing Rates after October 2005 for Class of 2006.

FIGURE 7. UBSCT Percent of Students Passing Rates after October 2005 for Class of 2007.



According to preliminary data posted by the USOE, 33% of Latina/o students in the graduating class of 2006 had yet to pass the mathematics portion of UBSCT after the spring 2006 administration, 13% had not passed reading, and 26% had not passed the writing portion.

rates are significant. For instance, there is 19% gap in passing rates between Latina/o students and their White peers in reading, 25% gap in writing, and 31% gap in mathematics for the class of 2006. For the class of 2007, the gaps are more striking with a 38% gap between pass rates in reading for Latina/o and White students, 33% gap in writing, and 35% in mathematics. While informative, these data are not sufficient to evaluate how many students in any given group have not been tested at all. According to preliminary data posted by the USOE, 33% of Latina/o students in the graduating class of

2006 had yet to pass the mathematics portion of UBSCT after the spring 2006 administration, 13% had not passed reading, and 26% had not passed the writing portion.

Advanced Placement Participation

Nationally, Latina/o students take more foreign language advanced placement (AP) courses than their peers—over twice that of their White peers, for instance. However, as Llagas and Snyder (2003) reported, a smaller percentage of Latina/o students were enrolled in English, mathematics, and

TABLE 8: PERCENTAGE OF UTAH STUDENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY TAKING ADVANCED COURSES

Race/Ethnicity	Advanced Courses English	Advanced Courses Mathematics	Advanced courses Science +	Advanced Courses Foreign Language
American Indian/ Alaska Native	17.60%	26.90%	16.30%	0.10%
African American	26.60%	30.40%	22.30%	2.40%
Asian/Pacific Islander	31.90%	55.50%	44.10%	6.40%
Latina/o	22.30%	26.20%	22.30%	7.60%
White	30.80%	45.10%	33.80%	3.70%

The number of Latina/o students participating in Advanced Placement remains well below that of their White peers, which mimics the participation nationwide.

SOURCE: UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION. + Courses include Chemistry I, II, Physics I, II or Advanced Biology

TABLE 9: ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAM PARTICIPATION FOR LATINA/O STUDENTS IN UTAH

Year	Total Exam Takers	Total Exams Taken	Scored 3-5
2000	300	429	284
2001	348	508	306
2002	399	571	352
2003	483	709	451
2004	585	834	548

SOURCE: COLLEGE BOARD (2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004) AP SUMMARY REPORTS

science AP courses.

nationwide (College Board, 2006).

In 2005, Utah joined two other states in having more than 20% of its students attain AP credit. According to the College Board (2006), three states—Florida, the District of Columbia, and Maryland all have participation rates among Latina/o students in Advanced Placement courses higher than the percent of students participating in non-advanced placement courses (p. 10). Reportedly, 4% of Utah’s Latina/o students in the class of 2004 participated in the AP courses compared to the 7% of students who were Latina/o nationwide (College Board, 2005b). As indicated in the Table 9, participation on the AP exams in Utah increased from 2000 to 2004 for Latina/o students. Similarly, the number of qualifying scores for exams taken have also increased during this time. Students who receive either a three, four, or five (qualifying score) on any given exam may earn credit or placement at colleges and universities. Despite this progress, the number of Latina/o students participating in this program remains well below that of their White peers, which mimics the participation

SAT Reasoning Test and ACT Performance

Table 10 illustrates the number of students participating in the SAT I now referred to as the SAT Reasoning Test. According to College Board, the SAT Reasoning Test measures critical thinking skills. A smaller percentage of students in the state of Utah take the SAT than the ACT (American College Testing). While the current edition of the SAT Reasoning Test requires a writing component, for the purposes of our analysis we report on the verbal and the mathematics scores. In addition, although typically juniors and seniors take this test, the table below depicts the participation and performance of seniors only.

The ACT, which is taken primarily by students who plan to enter post-secondary education, assesses general knowledge across four areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. An optional writing test is now available. In 2005, ACT reported that 68% of students graduating participated

In 2005, the composite scores for African American and Black students and Mexican American and Chicano students in Utah were slightly above the national composite score while students who were American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian were slightly below their peers nationally.

SOURCE: COLLEGE BOARD
COLLEGE BOUND SENIORS,
STATE PROFILE REPORT:
UTAH. HTTP://WWW.COLLEG-
EBOARD.COM/PROD_DOWN-
LOADS/ABOUT/NEWS_INFO/
CBSENIO/YR2005/UTAH-
2005.PDF

TABLE 10: COMPARISON OF SAT I (REASONING) TEST TAKERS AND MEAN SCORES BY STUDENT GROUP IN UTAH

Student group	2001	2001	2001	2005	2005	2005
	Total test takers	Verbal mean score	Math mean score	Total test takers	Verbal mean score	Math mean score
<i>African American or Black</i>	15	569	508	29	487	461
<i>American Indian or Alaskan Native</i>	8	499	494	16	513	478
<i>Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander</i>	135	545	604	149	550	610
<i>Latin American, South American, Central American or Other Hispanic or Latina/o</i>	18	562	554	50	520	492
<i>Mexican or Mexican American</i>	32	553	514	40	530	489
<i>Puerto Rican</i>	5	502	486	2	--	--
<i>White</i>	1,115	586	577	1,485	576	565
<i>Other</i>	43	569	538	70	556	547
<i>Total</i>	1,371			1,841		

SOURCE: ACT (2005A,
2005B) AND BENCHMARKS
FOR SUCCESS REPORTED BY
ACT (ALLEN & SCORING,
2005).

TABLE 11: AVERAGE ACT SCORES FOR RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS: UTAH 2005

	Benchmarks For Success	Utah Average Score	African American	American Indian, Alaskan Native	Asian American/Pacific Islander	Mexican American/Chicano	Puerto Rican/Hispanic	White
Total Group N=			120	211	568	555	306	17,100
<i>English</i>	18	21.1	16.7	16	20.3	17.9	18	21.4
<i>Usage/Mech</i>			7.8	7.5	10	8.5	8.5	10.6
<i>Rhet Skills</i>			8.8	8.4	10.6	9.4	9.5	11.2
<i>Mathematics</i>	22	21	16.7	17.7	21.1	18.3	18.6	21.2
<i>Pre/Elem-Alg</i>			8.2	8.6	11	9.2	9.3	11.1
<i>Alg/Crd-Geom</i>			8.5	8.9	10.7	9.1	9.5	10.6
<i>Plane Geom/Trig</i>			8.1	8.7	10.5	9.2	9.1	10.7
<i>Reading</i>	21	22.2	18	18.4	21.2	19.5	19.3	22.4
<i>Soc Stu/Sci</i>			9.1	9.4	11	9.9	9.7	11.5
<i>Language Arts/Literature</i>			8.9	9	10.6	9.8	9.7	11.4
<i>Science</i>	24	21.4	17.8	18.1	21	19.3	19.4	21.6
<i>Composite</i>		21.5	17.4	17.6	21	18.9	18.9	21.8

in the ACT. The highest score possible for students taking the ACT is 36. In 2005, the composite scores for African American and Black students and Mexican American and Chicano students in Utah were slightly above the national composite score while students who were American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian were slightly below their peers nationally. See Table 11 for Average ACT scores disaggregated.

Each year, ACT provides benchmark values. Allen and Sconing (2005) reported ACT benchmarks for 2005. The benchmarks were: 18 for English, 22 for mathematics, 21 for reading, and 24 for science. They provided this explanation:

the benchmark values represent predictive indicators of success for typical students at typical colleges. They give students, parents, and counselors an easy and reliable guide—a standardized point of reference—as to whether a student has the knowledge and skills needed to have a reasonable chance of success in college (p.3).

With this in mind, we note that Latina/o students who participated in the ACT met the benchmarks in English only. Students identified as Asian American and Pacific

Islander and those students identified as White met benchmarks in English and reading. None of the student groups met the benchmarks for success in mathematics or science in 2005.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only means of comparing students in one state to their peers in other states and the nation. Although participation in NAEP is voluntary, states that receive Title I funds must participate in the NAEP reading and mathematics assessments at both the fourth and eighth grade. Utah has participated in the NAEP reading and mathematics assessments since 1992, the NAEP writing since 1998, and the NAEP science since 1996. In 2005, 2900 students in Utah participated in the 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics NAEP assessments.¹¹

Again, NAEP results are generally used to compare students in one state to their peers in other states and nationally. Figures 8 and 9 provide data on the percent of

Latina/o and White students in Utah and the nation who are

We note that Latina/o students who participated in the ACT met the benchmarks in English only. Students identified as Asian American and Pacific Islander and those students identified as White met benchmarks in English and reading.

FIGURE 8. 2003 NAEP 4th and 8th Grade Reading and Mathematics, Percent Proficient (or Above) for Latina/o and White Students in Utah and the Nation.

¹¹ NCES (2005) reported the approximate available sample for participation as 36,000 eligible students.

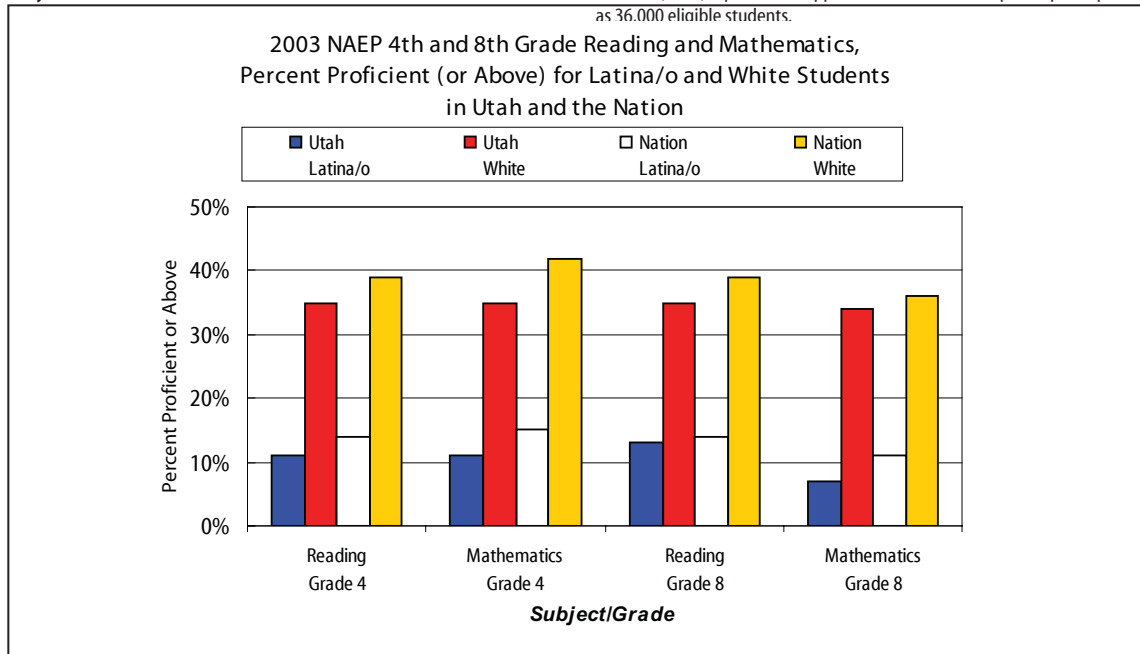
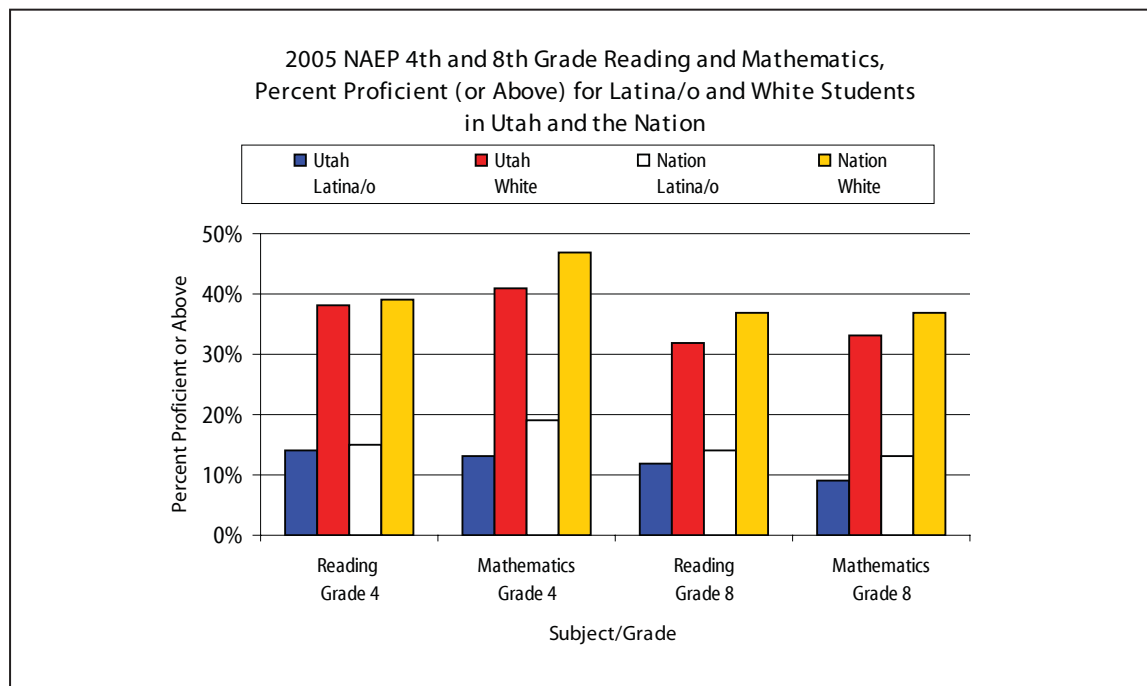


FIGURE 9. 2003 NAEP 4th and 8th Grade Reading and Mathematics, Percent Proficient (or Above) for Latina/o and White Students in Utah and the Nation.



proficient or above on the 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics NAEP assessments in 2003 and 2005. Proficiency levels on NAEP are not equated to state assessments. For the purpose of our discussion, we will highlight the comparison between Latina/o students in Utah and the Nation to their White peers. We do not currently have comparable data to report African American, American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander students due to insufficient sample sizes.

The percent of Latina/o students in Utah at or above proficiency in NAEP reading at the 4th grade increased by 3% between 2003 and 2005. Yet, the gap between Latina/o students and White students on the 4th grade reading assessment remained unchanged at 24% between 2003 and 2005. The percent of Latina/o students in Utah at or above proficiency in mathematics at the 4th grade increased by 2% between 2003 and 2005. Yet, the gap between Latina/o students and White students on the 4th grade mathematics NAEP increased by 4% between 2003 and 2005. The percent of Latina/o students in Utah at or above proficiency in NAEP reading at the 8th grade between 2003 and 2005 declined

by 1%. Meanwhile the gap between Latina/o students and White students on the 8th grade reading NAEP decreased by 2% because the percent of White students at or above proficiency declined by 3% between 2003 and 2005. The percent of Latina/o students in Utah at or above proficiency in mathematics at the 8th grade increased by 2% between 2003 and 2005. This increase combined with a decrease in proficiency levels among White students from 2003 to 2005 resulted in a 2% gap. The proficiency levels of Latina/o and White students in Utah are below their peers nationally in both NAEP reading and mathematics at both the 4th and 8th grade.

Dropout and Graduation Rates

Nationally, dropout rates are higher among Latina/o students than their White or African American peers regardless of which dropout rate (i.e. event or status) is considered.¹² The event dropout rate for Latina/os

¹² According NCES (2005), event dropout is defined as the proportion of high school students who dropped out over a one year interval of time. Status dropout is defined as the percent of persons age 16 to 24 who have not completed high school. The status completion rate is the proportion of 18 through 24 year olds not currently enrolled in

For the 2005-06 academic year, Latina/o students represented 4.1% of the total student population at the University of Utah.

age 15-24 in 2001 was 8.8%, which is higher than any other student group; the status dropout rate for Latina/o students age 16-24 was 27% (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2005).¹³ Nationally, fewer Latina/os have completed high school programs. As Kaufman et al., noted "64.1 percent of all Hispanic 18- through 24 year olds had completed secondary schooling. This compares with 91.8 percent of White, 83.7 percent of Black, and 94.6 percent of Asian young adults" (p. 19). They further report that nationally the status completion rate for Latina/os was 65.7 in 2001.

Utah currently determines the graduation rate as the proportion of the students leaving high school who have received a high school diploma for completing a public secondary education program (NCES, 2005).¹⁴ NCES (2004) reported that the dropout rate for Latina/o students in grades 9-12 in Utah for the 2000-01 school year was 9%.¹⁵ For this same time period, high school completers in Utah was reported as 60.8% for Latina/o students compared to 67.4% for American Indians and Alaskan Natives, 76.8% for Asian and Pacific Islanders, 61.2% for Blacks, and 84.9% for Whites (NCES, 2005).

Higher Education Enrollment and Attainment

The advantages of diversity of all types in K-12 and higher education is well established. As Gurin (1999) concluded, "There is a consistent pattern of positive relationships

school at the elementary or secondary level who have earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a GED credential.

¹³ Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman (2004) used U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey data from 2001.

¹⁴ Due to the methodology for calculations, dropout rates generally lag behind at least a year.

¹⁵ See individual tables at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/dropout00-01/tables.asp> for the methodology and calculation used by NCES for these rates.

between diversity in higher education and both learning and democracy outcomes" (¶ 6). Yet, participation and completion rates among Latina/os and other students of color are not comparable to their White peers.

In 2002, the college entrance rate for Latina/o students nationwide was 53.5% (PostSecondary, 2003). Using data from NCES, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) (2003) reported that in 1993, 783 Latina/os were enrolled either as undergraduates, graduate students, and professional enrollment at public and independent two and four-year institutions in Utah. This was less than 1% of the total enrollment in post-secondary education at that time. In 2003, Latina/o students in Utah represented 1,306 of those enrolled in post-secondary education while White students represented 87% of the post-secondary education enrollment in Utah in 1993 and 85% in 2003.

Although the number of Latina/o students currently enrolled in post-secondary education has increased, it is not commensurate with the K-12 Latina/o student population. At the University of Utah, for example, Latina/o student enrollment in 1970-71 was 171 students or less than 1% (0.8%) of the total student population (OBIA, 2005). By 1987-88, Latina/o student enrollment at the University of Utah reached 2% where it remained through the 1989-90 academic year. For the 2005-06 academic year, Latina/o students represented 4.1% of the total student population at the University of Utah. Again, 12% of the elementary and secondary student population in Utah are Latina/o. For the 2004-2005 school year, 3.4% of students enrolled in Utah's higher education institutions were Latina/o, which is up slightly from 3.1% in 2000-2001 (USHE, 2005). Enrollment in

In 2003, Latina/o students in Utah represented 1,306 of those enrolled in post-secondary education while White students represented 87% of the post-secondary education enrollment in Utah in 1993 and 85% in 2003.

Despite increasing enrollment among Latina/os in post-secondary education, enrollment figures for Latina/os in higher education institutions that grant bachelor degrees remains lower than for White students both in Utah and nationally.

More Latina/o students are enrolled in two-year institutions and vocational-technical institutions than their White peers.

In 2000, 25% of Latina/os in Utah aged 25-34 had an Associate's Degree or higher while 24% of Latina/os held a bachelor's degree or higher (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004).

2004-2005 among African American and American Indian/Alaskan Native students was significantly less at .7% and 1.1% respectively.

Despite slightly increasing enrollment rates for Latina/os in post-secondary education generally, enrollment figures for Latina/os in higher education institutions that grant bachelor degrees remains lower than for White students both in Utah and nationally. These enrollment patterns reflect the differential access we see available in early and secondary education. Villalpando (2006) explains:

Despite an official end to de jure racial segregation, higher education continues to reflect a state of de facto racial segregation for Latina/o college students. Latina/o college students are not only concentrated in institutions considered to be of lesser prestige and with fewer resources, such as the community colleges, but can expect to achieve lower levels of academic achievement—and social mobility—as a result of attending these types of institutions. (p. 39)

As Villalpando suggests, further attention must be given to the enrollment of Latina/o students in community colleges. The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) reported that 11% of Latina/os aged 25 and older held a bachelor's degree nationwide compared to 28% of Whites and 17% of African Americans and 44% of Asian and Pacific Islanders. In 2006, Holzner, Jameson, Maloney, Abebe, Lund and Schaub reported that 9.9% of Latina/os in Utah had an Associate's Degree or higher while 6.4% of Latina/os held a bachelor's degree or higher. They also noted 12.2% of U.S. born Latina/os had at least an associate's degree while 8.0% held a

bachelor's degree. Using NELS (National Educational Longitudinal Survey) data from 1988 to 2000, Fry (2004) found that nationally Latina/o students were more likely to be enrolled in what he termed "open door" institutions, which were two-year institutions and vocational-technical institutions than their White peers. He concluded that of the Latina/o students who enroll in post-secondary education, 60% of these students enroll first in the either a two-year or vocational-technical institution. Nationally, Fry noted that Latina/o students who enter these institutions are less likely than White students to then seek a bachelor's degree. Due to insufficient data on two-year and vocational-technical institutions, we are unable to compare these data at the state level for Utah.

Initiating a Discourse of Latina/o Educational Achievement

Again, although many groups and individuals in the state of Utah have recognized and have been working independently to close achievement gaps for Latina/o students (Solórzano, 2005), recently this issue has gained more-widespread prominence at the state-level. For instance, during the 2005 Legislative session Representative David Litvack proposed an appropriations bill to create an Educational Achievement Gap Task Force that would study educational achievement gaps.¹⁶ While the bill sponsored by Representative Litvack was not passed out of committee, in May 2005 recently-elected Governor

¹⁶ HB 175 was initially introduced in the House Education committee in January 2005. At the end of the session, a motion passed to have the bill assigned for study during the interim session.

As the state's Latina/o population continues to grow, it will become increasingly important for school district administrators, teachers, and policymakers to become more attuned to the opportunities provided by a diverse student population and value the positive contributions that this group of students and their families bring to their neighborhood schools and communities around the state.

Jon Huntsman, Jr. assembled a group of educators, policymakers, researchers, and community activists to consider policy recommendations aimed at closing achievement gaps. The Governor's Working Group on Student Achievement, which was initially named the Governor's Working Group on Achievement Gaps, met periodically for six months. The purpose of the Working Group was to develop state educational policy recommendations and consider relevant educational research.¹⁷

As the state's Latina/o population continues to grow, it will become increasingly important for school district administrators, teachers, and policymakers to become more attuned to the opportunities provided by a diverse student population and value the positive contributions that this group of students and their families bring to their neighborhood schools and communities around the state. Given the multiple, pervasive, and systemic achievement gaps that exist for Latina/o students in Utah, we argue that it is crucial that educational leaders, community advocates, and policymakers also begin to set a framework for discussing, analyzing and proposing policy solutions. While we believe that a comprehensive policy framework should include a micropolitical level (i.e. local school district and/or campus level) analysis, the intent of this section is to initiate a discourse about Latina/o educational achievement at the macro-political or state policymaking level. We suggest that broader systemic, institutional, and structural issues, such as raising educational achievement and closing achievement gaps, can be effectively addressed at this level.

A narrow understanding of educational history, politics and policy, and a false reliance on notions of individual determination without consideration

¹⁷ We served on this Working Group as participant researchers. In part, our responsibility on this group was to provide research to ground recommendations. September 2006

of systemic and institutional barriers to success have contributed to the persistent achievement gaps in the state. In an effort to initiate a discourse for raising Latina/o educational achievement and closing achievement gaps, we discuss three factors necessary to alleviate the dismal state of educational affairs for Latina/os. The first factor is the necessity for the state political and educational leadership to address the systemic inequities and institute policies that provide equal educational opportunities to all Utah public school students. Next, a shift must occur in the political culture to promote equity, to emphasize the significance of providing equal educational opportunities for all students, and to value the diverse cultures, languages, histories, and cultural heritages of Latina/os and all students of color. The third factor is comprehensive and strategic policy reform. To date, strategic educational policy reform has not been proposed nor implemented; this, too, has hindered the type of structural and institutional change that is necessary to raise achievement and close achievement gaps. Through transformational leadership, a reframed political culture and values, and a broad policy blueprint from which to instigate reform, we contend that authentic, democratic, and significant change may occur. Reforming education in the state requires a commitment and the ability to increase the capacity of districts, schools, and teachers to achieve equity, and social justice.

Leadership

At the opening meeting of Governor Huntsman's Working Group on Student Achievement, Lieutenant Governor Gary R. Herbert stopped by to welcome those participating in committee work. In his brief comments, he

A narrow understanding of educational history, politics and policy, and a false reliance on notions of individual determination without consideration of systemic and institutional barriers to success contribute to the persistent achievement gaps in the state.

We caution that calls for "decorum" and less "contentiousness" and calls for "better" communication may silence the needs of communities of color, English language learners, and students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Seeing the diversity of the state as an opportunity rather than a detriment requires a rejection of deficit views.

Clearly, the future of educational opportunities for Latina/o students and students of color, English language learners, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch depends in large part on whether state and political leaders choose to exert the political will necessary to introduce, endorse, promote, and implement state legislation and policies to address educational achievement gaps or whether debate and efforts extinguished.

When environments are hostile, unwelcoming, or belittling to those not of the dominant group, educational achievement gaps percolate and grow.

warned the group to create change through dialogue and effective communication. He stated:

I spoke a little earlier to principals of [the] elementary school association through the state and talked about at least something I think we need to do better, and that is talk. We need to communicate better. I know that everybody has their own view of the world and their issues and philosophy of life and how things ought to be. But over a period of time...at least in my view, it has got a little bit too contentious. And, we perceive each other sometimes you know, we have different points of view, as the enemy. And we ought not to be.

We agree that we should not look at those that oppose our views as adversaries. However, we caution that calls for “decorum” and less “contentiousness” and calls for “better” communication may silence the needs of communities of color, English language learners, and students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. For instance, an inaccurate assessment of education in a state that reports “strong academic performance” among the state’s public school population without disclosing the plethora of data exhibiting achievement gaps for the sake of “better” communication is irresponsible. Disclosing the disparity in achievement among racial, ethnic, socioeconomic status, and students with special needs is a first step toward increasing policy solutions. Moreover, a serious critique of the conditions that maintain achievement gaps would contribute significantly to a discussion and authentic debate over the issues and solutions, including addressing the state’s responsibility for

closing educational gaps.¹⁸ State educational and political leadership are uniquely poised to develop and implement policy solutions that make any measurable gains in closing the gaps. Clearly, the future of educational opportunities for Latina/o students and students of color, English language learners, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch depends in large part on whether state and political leaders choose to exert the political will necessary to introduce, endorse, implement, and evaluate state legislation and policies to address educational achievement gaps or whether debate and efforts extinguished.

Political Culture and Values

When environments are hostile, unwelcoming, or belittling to those not of the dominant group, educational achievement gaps percolate and grow. Seeing the diversity of the state as an opportunity rather than as a detriment requires a rejection of deficit views (Valencia, 1997). Instead, a constructive view includes an understanding that all students bring with them the ability to learn and that diverse

18 A high-ranking representative on the Utah House Public Education Committee stated the following:

With appreciation for the focus that has been given [to the educational achievement gaps], I would like to state another point of view. I attended school all over the United States. Growing up my father was in the Air Force, I attended [school in] Massachusetts and in New Mexico with all colors and focus of people but somehow we didn't seem to spend so much time dividing up people by their color then...I think we should judge people on their abilities and not the color of their skin whether they are teaching or being a student...We tell groups that they are at-risk, that they are targeted, that they are an endangered species, we create a victim mentality. I don't think that that is a fair thing for us to do to them or to us as a society. I think we need to ignore the fact that people have different backgrounds, whatever they are, whether it is social or economic...I am the person, at least one of them, that Senator [Howard] Stephenson [R-Draper] was referring to when he said that there are people who do not want to focus on the gap. I don't think focusing on the gap is a noble goal. (November 9, 2005, Public Education Interim Committee meeting)

communities contribute positively to the social fabric of our state.

An example of a deficit notion of diverse communities and Latina/o students is illustrated in the following comment by a former government leader. This testimony was given at a Public Education Interim Committee as a rationale for consideration of adequacy in funding.

There is a debate about adequacy and equity in this whole environment that is a little difficult for most of us to grasp... What it tries to say is that if you are Millcreek Canyon, for example, and you've grown up to a lot of exposure to vocabulary and reading and you start school at a certain level then what you need to get to the next level for grade proficiency is very different than if you come from say, [west Salt Lake school name], where you don't have much exposure to vocabulary before you hit school. You don't bring a lot of skills, perhaps, to the table when you enter the school system.

Clearly, the assumption in the previous statement is that students who attend the school identified, which is a school with a predominant Latina/o student body and with 89% of its student eligible for free-and-reduced lunch, are "less than," have parents who don't value education, and educate children that "don't bring a lot skills" with them into the educational setting. These assertions, similar to the underlying assumptions, are inaccurate. In fact, low expectations and deficit views, and misunderstandings of the capital and wealth (Yosso, 2006) of Latino families are among the significant factors that contribute to a lack of state policies aimed at creating an equitable education system. If the state is to benefit from a well-educated workforce and fully active citizenry, leadership will have to overcome its

September 2006

deficit notions of those that are different and commit to changing current educational practices and policies.

State Policy, Practice, and Reform

The existence and persistence of achievement gaps in the state indicate that current policies and legislation are inadequate to address current needs. Yet increasing diversity, immigrant communities, and increasing population of students who are English Language Learners, coupled with an aging population, stagnated public school funding, federal accountability requirements, and a need to stimulate the economic engine of the state present an opportunity for the state to create innovative and successful schooling.

Frequently, the achievement gap is defined narrowly as just outcome scores on state mandated criterion referenced or norm referenced assessments. While unquestionably the data available from these assessments can provide useful diagnostic information and information helpful to an accountability system, we do not believe that these data are sufficient to explain the scope or magnitude of the achievement gaps that persist. As we have demonstrated with the presentation of data in the previous section, our conceptualization of what educational achievement gaps entail is much more holistic, broad, and comprehensive. Adopting this view requires that multiple, comprehensive, and strategic policy solutions be considered across K-12 and higher education. Furthermore, this approach allows us to understand the issue of closing educational achievement gaps as a long-term project, one devoid of piecemeal, shortsighted policy programs and pilot projects.

Since the state's reliance on state's rights arguments have failed to date to provide equitable access and opportunities, the state seems poised to consent and respond to federal requirements for educational improvement, and substantively

The existence and persistence of achievement gaps in the state indicate that current policies and legislation are inadequate to address current needs.

Recent efforts to collapse student groups into two aggregated categories—White and not on Free and Reduced Lunch and all other groups of students—is further evidence of the state's reluctance to ensure accountability at the school or district-level for the performance and achievement of students in all groups.

School funding and finance of schools' operations, maintenance, and capital costs has historically been unequal and unjust.

Clearly, accurate, accessible, and transparent data are one necessary element of a suggested strong accountability system.

change or develop its own policies and efforts to address achievement gaps. In fact, future educational reform aimed at addressing achievement gaps demands a shift in state focus and priorities. The following are suggested state policy solutions that can guide and support practice at the district and school level.

Accountability system

As previously addressed, Utah touts a sophisticated state-wide accountability system. Despite progress in the state on curriculum, standards, and assessments aligned with state standards, the state overall has been reluctant to adopt what might be considered a strong accountability system—one that moves beyond reporting functions.¹⁹ Reporting functions, regardless of how informative, are not equivalent to accountability requirements.

Utah doesn't currently rate its schools or districts based on performance of students collectively or in student groups. In fact, recent efforts to collapse student groups into two aggregated categories—White and not on Free and Reduced Lunch and all other groups of students—is further evidence of the state's reluctance to ensure accountability at the school or district-level for the performance and achievement of students in all groups. As one state-level administrator noted (USOE, 2005), with this policy element, "students are more fairly represented" in that "each student only counts once,

regardless of the number of subgroups in which the student qualifies..." and "this lifts the burden of one subgroup being the sole determinant of unacceptable status [under NCLB] of the school." This view, which seems to dominate concern over accountability from the state, sends a strong message that many believe it is the students' sole responsibility to perform rather than the schools' shared responsibility to address the needs of individual students and student groups.

In an effort to be different from the requirements associated with NCLB, the state has created a separate system of reporting, rather than an integrated system of accountability. Accountability is a complex phenomenon (Rorrer, 2003). Assuredly, as some research has indicated (McNeil, 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Sloan, 2005), accountability in some schools and districts is used as the rationale for limiting curriculum, teaching to the test, and restricting teacher autonomy. We would argue that this occurs in the absence of leadership and understanding about how to utilize and adapt accountability policies in ways that leverage reform necessary to improve the educational opportunities of children in schools, particularly children of color, children who are English language learners, children with disabilities, and children eligible for Free and Reduced lunch (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Obviously, this perspective requires a shift from avoidance to one that asks how schools, districts, and the state can be held accountable for the performance and achievement of Latina/o students and other students of color, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students on Free and Reduced lunch so that the quality of and access to educational opportunities in the state is provided to all students?

We, once again, urge policymakers to take a more critical analytical perspective when considering the fairness inherent in the state's system of financing education.

¹⁹ Rorrer & Skrla (2005) defined accountability as "a broad range of policy initiatives including curriculum, standards; information, reporting, and assessment systems; performance and growth indicators; and rewards and sanctions that hold both institutions and students accountable for academic performance and/or expected growth. Accountability is not limited to or used synonymously with testing, which is only one indicator in an accountability system" (p. 61)

Clearly, accurate, accessible, and transparent data are one necessary element to a strong accountability system. While the capacity for this may be available at the state-level, it has not emerged to date. As a result, we are frequently left with aggregated data and reports that mask or diminish educational achievement gaps. Future discussions of accountability in the state must address how to design an accountability system that holds schools and districts accountable for the performance and growth of all students; how to inform all constituents of the areas of success as well as those that need improvement; how to support efforts of schools and districts in constructive ways; and how to recognize success and share best practices.

School finance and funding

School funding and the manner by which states finance their schools' operations, maintenance, and capital costs has historically been unequal and unjust (Anyon, 1997; Hunter, 2004; Kozol, 1991). Most states in the Union have undergone years of litigation and legislation, as their leaders have attempted to reach a more "equalized" or "equitable" method of paying for teachers' salaries, school construction, and the annual investment in its communities' students. Utah, however, is one of seven states to have never had its state funding system challenged in its highest court (Hunter, 2004). This fact has created a perception that Utah funds its schools equitably. We, once again, urge policymakers to take a more critical analytical perspective when considering the fairness inherent in the state's system of financing education.

There are three clear assessments of educational funding in Utah. That is, Utah schools are under-funded, classrooms are oversized, and schools with higher percentages of students of color receive fewer dollars per pupil. Here we discuss these in more detail.

First, Utah consistently ranks among the worst, if not the worst, in per pupil expenditures when compared to all state expenditure levels (Biddle & Berliner, 2002b; Galvin & Robins, 2001; Education Trust, 2004). The Utah Foundation (2002) reports NCES data from 1999 that demonstrates how state legislators have appropriated the least amount of per pupil funding when compared to all other states. They also state that although the largest portion of the budget is dedicated to school expenditures, the percentage has decreased in recent years. As an indication of state funding and making comparisons to the national average of per pupil expenditures, the Utah Foundation calculates that in 1999 dollars, it would require that the state legislature appropriate an additional \$1 billion to place the state just above the national average. Finally, the state's "commitment" to its schools was calculated by Education Trust (2001). Using 1997-98 NCES data, they calculated the percentage of the state's wealth dedicated to education spending. Measured as total state and local investment for every \$1,000 in annual personal income, the state of Utah spent \$38.27 (the high was \$52.77 by Vermont and the low was \$27.07 by Delaware). So, although at first glance it appears that the state is fully committed to state educational spending, when calculating the "effort" of state appropriations in relation to personal income, the level of commitment is less impressive.

Next, Utah consistently ranks among the worst, if not the worst, in class size when compared to all state class size levels (Utah Foundation, 2002). As indicated by the Utah Foundation, "Utah has the highest class sizes in the country, with a ratio of about 22 pupils for each teacher" (p. 5). Again, this reported average class size doesn't fully capture the degree to which classrooms in Utah are overcrowded. In order to fully assess class size in a meaningful way that can be used to inform policy, access to state-level data are

Utah consistently ranks among the worst, if not the worst, in class size when compared to all state class size levels.

Utah funds districts with the highest percentage of students of color at lower rates.

Issues of how to fund schools can no longer be treated separately from how to make them better.

Achieving equity is a primary goal in efforts to close the gaps.

However, a more progressive move toward adequacy of funding must simultaneously be endorsed to achieve this goal.

Utah has not funded its schools equitably. Given achievement gaps in the state coupled with funding levels consistently ranked last among all state funding systems, it appears that adequacy has also not been reached.

necessary. The report also states that although the average is the highest when compared to the U.S. average, neighboring states, similar population states, and similar income states, it remains uncommon to have classes that exceed 30 students per teacher. Class size policies²⁰ continue to be debated extensively (Biddle & Berliner, 2002a). However, what remains evident is that the more money that districts or schools have available, the easier it is for them to hire and pay for more teachers, thus reducing class size.

Third, Utah funds districts with the highest percentage of students of color at lower rates. U.S. Department of Education data from 1996-97 and analyzed by Education Trust (2001) and from 2001-02 and analyzed by Carey (2004) for the Education Trust, Inc., indicate that Utah does not fund those districts with higher percentages of students of color equitably. In fact, those districts are funded less, \$250 less per student in 1996-97 and \$325 less per student in 2001-02, than those districts with the lowest percentage of students of color.²¹ Education Watch calculates that the \$250 less per student costs those districts an average of \$6,250 per typical classroom of 25 students. If extrapolated for the same typical classroom, the average cost for districts with high percentages of students of color using the 2001-02 data would be \$8,125 per classroom. Although some could dispute these

20 We later address the need to focus on class size policies and the benefits of such policies (Achilles, 1996; Bingham, 1994; Bracey, 1998; Finn, 1998; Nye et al., 1995; Word et al., 1990) in the "school factors" section of this report.

21 See the following website for discussion of research methodology and technical analysis. The Education Trust web site also has the corresponding report available for free. The technical analysis and methodology may be found at <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/BE20DDE8-0053-4F67-9B13-CCA748342D3E/0/TheFunding-Gap04technical.pdf>.

calculations and the methodologies utilized by these researchers, the fact remains that districts with higher percentages of students of color, in fact, need more funding than districts in order to move from "equality" to "equity". The Utah educational state funding system has not been challenged in the legal system and although common perception promotes the idea that school funding equity is excellent, a re-thinking of how Utah schools are funded must be promoted if achievement gaps are to be closed.

The inequitable effects of Utah school funding are not uncommon. Schools are funded unequally throughout the nation (Biddle & Berliner, 2002b). Carey states that:

The shortfalls we found, some exceeding \$1,000 or even \$2,000 per student, are starkly at odds with our national goals for closing the achievement gap. They fly in the face of any reasonable, rational notion of how to support our public schools. Until state policymakers get serious about fixing these problems, they cannot in good conscience pretend to have fulfilled their basic obligations to those students who are most in need of a high-quality public education. (p. 2)

Getting serious about reform in school funding will not be easily attained in the current political environment. Choice programs, including charter school funding, vouchers, and tuition tax credits, have captured the interest of state lawmakers rather than funding for bills supporting such things as optional all-day kindergarten funding.²² As recently

22 A State Senator stated, "In the Senate, all-day kindergarten is not a priority. There is a feeling that we get a greater bang for the buck in other areas. Legislators feel that performance is a good way of enhancing outcomes, rather than adding money to programs like all-day kindergarten." (February 28, 2006, Salt Lake Tribune, Celia Baker)

TABLE 12: PERCENT OF LATINA/O TEACHERS IN DISTRICTS WITH GREATEST PERCENTAGE OF LATINA/O STUDENTS

District	Latina/o Student Enrollment Fall 2004 District %	% of Latina/o Teachers 2004-2005*†
Ogden	41.69%	4%
Salt Lake	34.74%	6%
Provo	21.15%	1%
Granite	20.51%	1%
Logan	18.38%	1%

SOURCE: ESCALANTE, BURNHAM, EASTMOND (2005). † Percent of total educators includes an “other” category. Thus, percent of educators who identify as Latina/o, or any other group, may be higher than reported.

According to Education Trust (2004), the percentage of Utah secondary classes taught by teachers lacking a major or minor in their field in 1999-2000 in schools with 15% or less students of color was 18%.

written about in the state’s newspapers, organizations such as Parents for Choice in Education are actively organizing, supporting, and recruiting representatives to run against legislators—both Republican and Democrat—that did not or would not carry the banner of vouchers in the last legislative session (Canham, 2006).

Achieving equity is a primary goal in efforts to close the gaps. However, a more progressive move toward adequacy of funding must simultaneously be endorsed to achieve this goal. Court cases (Hunter, 2004), scholarship (Guthrie & Rothstein, 2001), and activism (Rebell & Wardenski, 2004) all emphasize the need to focus more on conceptualizing and defining adequacy or adequate funding levels. Here, we assert that adequacy involves the question of whether there is adequacy of inputs, adequacy of processes, and adequacy of educational outputs necessary to ensure that all students are able to attain the state standard of educational quality and excellence (Alexander, 2005; Herrington & Weider, 2001). In a report by WestEd (2000), they pose a question in regards to the evolution of school finance litigation and politics:

Issues of how to fund schools can no longer be treated separately from how to make them better. Funding debates and legal challenges that have long centered on “equity,” or how to fairly distribute available money, must also tackle the more basic question of “adequacy”

—How much is enough to educate a child? (p. 1)

As indicated here, Utah has not funded its schools equitably. Given achievement gaps in the state coupled with funding levels consistently ranked last among all state funding systems, it appears that adequacy has also not be reached. Any discussion of policies that close achievement gaps must include discussions of school funding around the following central issues. Who should receive any increases in funding? How should they be distributed? What is the optimum level of funding for achieving results? How can the state’s taxing system be restructured to generate additional funding?

Teacher and administrator diversity and quality

Additional data and analysis of who is teaching and leading in Utah’s public schools and with what credentials, what schools are they teaching at, and with what results is needed. Current available data do not provide sufficient information to ascertain the answers to these questions. We do, however, have a few indications of the gap in representation by Latina/o teachers particularly and teachers of color generally in the state. For instance, according to a recent study (Escalante, Burnham, & Eastmond, 2005), while 12% of the students in Utah are Latina/o, only 2% of teachers are identified as Latina/o. Comparatively, 17% of the students in Utah are students of color. Yet, only 4% of the teachers in

Regardless whether a teacher or administrator is a person of color or White, all educators need to have an understanding of diversity issues.

In addition to seeking and retaining teachers of color and developing an understanding of diversity, schools in the state must develop and implement a culturally relevant curriculum that is taught using a culturally-relevant pedagogy.

Further consideration of the development and implementation of bilingual, dual language classes is needed.

the state are persons of color. Table 12 illustrates the vast differences in the percent of Latina/o students and districts with the largest percent of Latina/o students enrolled and the percent of Latina/o teachers employed in the district.

According to Education Trust (2004), the percentage of Utah secondary classes taught by teachers lacking a major or minor in their field in 1999–2000 in schools with 15% or less students of color was 18%. Schools identified for the same time period as high poverty ($\geq 50\%$) had 50% of their teachers at the secondary level lacking a major or minor in their field, compared to 9% at low poverty ($\leq 15\%$) schools. High quality teachers of diverse backgrounds is necessary to eliminate achievement gaps. In fact, hiring teachers of color is an indication of the state, districts, and schools commitment to diversity. As we know, teachers of color benefit children, schools, and communities alike. For instance, teachers and administrators of color serve as role models—particularly for students of color (Su, 1996)—and as individuals who can connect to communities of color (Su, 1997), as agents for a culturally relevant curriculum and culturally relevant pedagogy. As Quiocho & Rios (2000) explained,

If we are to value a multicultural, anti-racist, and pro-justice approach to schooling, we need to find ways to increase the presence of minority group teachers in all schools (urban, suburban, rural, BIA, etc.). This would begin to ensure that all students have -multicultural schooling experiences via their teachers who represent the world in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture. But we also need to create space for discourse around the impact of race on schooling so that racist assumptions can be problematized.

Ayalon (2004) suggests that stronger school-university partnerships is one way to increase the number of teachers of color; we believe the same is true for increasing the number

of administrators of color. Moreover, Villegas & Clewell (1998) indicated that the teaching pool can become more diverse by recruiting persons of color from their paraprofessional roles in school.

Yet, increasing the numbers of teachers and administrators of color is insufficient to declare success. Regardless of whether a teacher or administrator is a person of color or White, all educators need to have an understanding of diversity issues. As Nieto (2000) states, this understanding begins with their own experiences and training, including facing and accepting of their own identities; becoming learners of their students' realities; becoming multilingual and multicultural; and developing a community of critical friends. Solórzano & Yosso (2001) suggest that a major step towards closing achievement gaps requires faculty who train teachers—and we would argue administrators—in preparation programs that challenge genetic and deficit theories using Critical Race Theory, for instance, as a means of “to better understand and challenge race, racism, and racial stereotypes in our classrooms” (p.6). We concur and believe that there are two primary opportunities for an understanding of diversity issues for teachers and administrators in the state to occur: pre-service education and in-service education. The education we speak of here would be on-going and integrated rather than tacked on as a “diversity requirement” that can be checked off.

Curriculum and pedagogy

In addition to seeking and retaining teachers of color and developing an understanding of diversity to close achievement gaps, schools in the state must develop and implement to all students a culturally relevant curriculum that is taught using a culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that culturally relevant pedagogy

Parental involvement goes beyond attendance at parent-teacher conferences, participation in PTA or help with homework.

has three criteria “(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay (2004) is “using the cultures and experiences of different ethnic groups as filters for teaching knowledge and skills schools deem as crucial” (p. 211-212). She adds that the major domains of culturally responsive teaching include:

- Multicultural content
- Pluralistic classroom climates and learning environments;
- Teacher attitudes and expectations toward diversity;
- Building community among diverse learners;
- Caring across cultures;
- Use of multiple teaching techniques that are congruent with the cultural backgrounds, values, experiences, and orientations of different ethnic groups;
- Developing personal efficacy and an ethos of success among diverse students;
- Using culturally informed assessment procedures to determine learning needs, knowledge acquisition, and skill proficiencies. (Gay, 2004, p. 212)

In part, shifting schools to a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy would require changes in the instruction for students who are English Language Learners, for instance. Culturally relevant pedagogy and supporting state policies would not aim to mainstream ELLs into English only classrooms and programs or create monolingual

students. In the current policy environment, ELLs are required to participate in state assessments. In fact, those who are English Language Learners should be supported in schools such that they are able to maintain their native language to achieve bilingualism and biliteracy (Jiménez, 2000; Smith et al., 2002). In addition to sheltered English instruction, further consideration of the development and implementation of bilingual, dual language classes is needed. Currently, ELLs are identified on a scale from A to E based on English proficiency levels from pre-emergent to fluent. Students who are ELLs must be given sufficient time with adequate support to develop proficiency in English language academic skills. The current performance of students who are ELLs in the state require that additional questions be asked regarding what are the qualifications of teachers who are teaching students who are ELLs, what is the nature of the curriculum, and what types of teaching strategies are used to instruct ELLs.

School factors

Frequently, when asked how to improve student achievement practitioners and policy makers alike will say, “increase parental involvement.” Although we don’t discount the importance of the involvement of caring adults in the lives and success of children, we have a different view of what involvement means. That is, parental involvement goes well beyond the scope of attendance at parent-teacher conferences or participation in the PTA or help with assigned homework. For example, scholars such as Valencia and Black (2002) have found that although myths regarding how Mexican Americans do not value education exist in scholarship, the media, and societal perceptions, the reality

Traditional and deficit views of parental involvement do not adequately capture the important and multiple ways that parents, guardians, and communities are and can be engaged with their children and their education through sharing culture, values, and work ethic.

Research (ECS, 2005; Fusaro, 1997) has indicated that universally accessible full-day kindergarten has resulted in academic benefits for students well beyond the kindergarten academic year.

Full-day kindergarten programs, particularly after their first year of implementation, offer more small group, one-on-one instruction, and student initiated activities (Elicker & Mathur, 1997) than half-day programs.

The positive effects of smaller classes are particularly evident when smaller class sizes are used in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

is that these families value educational opportunity and have struggled historically to attain the best opportunities for their children via such events as school desegregation and school finance court cases. Traditional and deficit views of parental involvement do not adequately capture the important and multiple ways that parents, guardians, and communities are and can be engaged with their children and their education through sharing culture, values, and work ethic.

There are three policy areas related to school factors that state educational and political leaders can address. These three areas are universally accessible kindergarten, means of reducing high school size, and class size reduction, generally.

As reported by the Children's Defense Fund (2005), Utah does not have a pre-kindergarten program universally available despite the burgeoning evidence that such programs help children to be ready-to-learn upon entry into kindergarten.²³ Head Start, which is a program designed to provide health, nutrition, education, and social services to children from low-income households, served approximately 5,518 students in 2004. Reportedly, 50% of those served were White while 32% of the children served were Latina/o. Collins and Ribeiro (2004) provided 10 general "action steps" for early childhood education that they believe if considered and "even handedly implemented" would increase achievement for all students. They compliment this list by specific recommendations to raise the achievement of Hispanic students.

Research (ECS, 2005; Fusaro, 1997) has indicated that universally accessible full-day kindergarten has

resulted in academic benefits for students well beyond the kindergarten academic year. As noted by the Education Commission of the States (2005), two related funding issues should be addressed in consideration of offering full-day kindergarten. The first is that full-day kindergarten programs should be accompanied by funding formulas that provide an incentive to districts for offering full-day programs and resources, including the same funding weight provided for 1st graders, for districts that do provide it. Next, if insufficient resources are available to make full-day kindergarten universally accessible, then resources should be used to address populations of students most in need. Currently, Utah is identified as one of the states that provides disincentives for offering full day kindergarten—not providing additional funding for full-day program and funding lower than that allocated for first grade (ECS, 2005). In the fall 2005, Representative Duane Bourdeaux presented recommendations for a pilot full-day kindergarten program, which would be granted based on eligible students for free and reduced lunch and percent of students who were English language learners and provide financial incentives to districts willing to participate in the pilot program, to the Governor's Working Group on Student Achievement. This recommendation was forwarded as one of the groups' consensus recommendations. Representative Kory Holdaway sponsored HB 107 for the 2006 Legislative session. HB 107, which was defeated, would have provided \$7 million to districts in order to offer a voluntary full-day kindergarten program with preference for funding given to schools with larger proportions of students identified on Free and Reduced lunch. The advantage of full-day kindergarten programs

23 In a longitudinal study, Reynolds, Temple, Robertson and Mann (2002) found that achievement scores and high school completion rates increased for preschool participants while there was also a lower rate of grade retention and special education placement, juvenile arrest, arrest for violent offenses, and maltreatment for preschool participants.

is not “more of the same.” Instead, full-day kindergarten programs generally provide additional time in the core areas—reading and mathematics—as well as including instruction in social studies, science, and other content areas such as art and often doing advanced work in these areas (Walston & West, 2004). Moreover, full-day kindergarten programs, particularly after their first year of implementation, offer more small group, one-on-one instruction, and student initiated activities (Elicker & Mathur, 1997) than half-day programs.

Nationwide, a majority of Latina/o students are educated in high schools with higher concentrations of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch as well as larger school size (Fry, 2005). Large schools are frequently cited for their economies-of-scale benefits, including efficient use of resources and broader range of course offerings. However, smaller schools have been supported for their climate, including increased individual attention for students, fewer dropouts, and less discipline issues, improved quality and productivity, and efficiency (Alspaugh, 1994; Cotton, 1996; Gladden, 1998). Research (Heath, 1994; Williams, 1990) suggests that elementary schools are more effective for students when they are between 200 to 400 students while 400 to 900 students are recommended (Farber; 1998; Lee & Smith, 1997; Williams, 1990) for junior and senior high schools. Lee and Smith (1997) found that reading and mathematics performance gains in schools with higher proportions of students of color and students eligible for Free and Reduced lunch was comparable to peer schools with lower proportions of students of color and students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch when school size remained between 600 and 900 with the achievement gap increasing in schools over 900. Locally, some high schools have already embraced changes in high school structures, such as a schools-within-school model, to

counteract the negative aspects of large high schools.

Findings (Achilles, 1996; Bingham, 1994; Bracey, 1998; Finn, 1998) on class size suggest that smaller classes contribute to increased achievement and performance, increased attention to individual student need, greater teacher efficacy, and improved classroom and school climate, particularly for students of color and students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. The positive effects of smaller classes are particularly evident when smaller class sizes are used in kindergarten through 3rd grade. While often policy alternatives to large class sizes has included the addition of a teachers aide, research (Word et al., 1990; Nye et al., 1995) indicates that this arrangement does not result in either increased student involvement or achievement as compared to the smaller class sizes. In the 2006 Utah Legislative Session, Representative Carol Spackman Moss sponsored HB 134, which was defeated. HB 134 would have appropriated an additional \$100 million dollars for class size reduction.

Conclusion

The existence of educational achievement gaps across K-12 and postsecondary educational settings is irrefutable. Equally evident is the increasingly anti-Latina/o environment created in part by legislative inaction in addressing inequities. Using a legal framework to deny access is nothing new in our country (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Spring, 1997; Takaki, 2000; Valencia, 2002). For example, consider how efforts to desegregate or require equitable funding have been opposed. As researchers, we argue that an excellent and equitable educational system is both a worthy and possible goal. However, this goal is only achievable through a confluence of efforts.

Overwhelming evidence of achievement gaps demonstrates how policy solutions to date have not addressed this issue. We have outlined a broad framework for addressing existing gaps strategically, including policy alternatives.

Many of the quotes in this paper exemplify the nature of the problem and provide a glimpse as to how the state's political environment and policies have established substantial barriers to closing educational achievement gaps. Overwhelming evidence of

Backed by research, we move away from the predominant blame the victim mentality, refocusing our thinking and vision on what may be accomplished through comprehensive institutional and structural changes.

achievement gaps demonstrates how policy solutions to date have not addressed this issue. We have outlined a broad framework for addressing existing gaps strategically, including policy alternatives. Backed by research, we move away from the predominant blame the victim mentality, refocusing our thinking and vision on what may be accomplished through comprehensive institutional and structural changes. While this paper serves to inform policymakers, administrators, and teachers of the pervasiveness of educational gaps for Latina/os and to outline strategic policy reform, we also seek to invite community activists, parents, and students to engage in the process. Through empowerment and advocacy, the voices and experiences of Latina/o communities can inform and influence changes in the educational system and the aforementioned policy areas in ways that are likely to better serve Latina/o students.

Clearly, the state's insistence and promotion of a quality educational system is compromised by the evidence of pervasive inequities for students of color generally and Latina/o students particularly. Ultimately, for educational achievement gaps to be eliminated for Latina/o students, community mobilization, empowerment, and advocacy must be accompanied by a commitment, will, and vision among the state's political and institutional leadership for an educational system that ensures access and opportunity in unprecedented ways both in K-12 and higher education. Although progress may be made with individual policy or reform initiatives, evidence suggests what is needed is a coherent and comprehensive plan for eradicating achievement gaps. Thus, we call for the state to honor its obligation and responsibility to provide an equitable

education for all children in Utah. A fair educational system would have significant benefits for the state, including the ability of the state to benefit from the human and cultural capital held by its diverse population. Continued failure to recognize the need for a changed educational system will result in the inability of the state's economic engine to sustain itself. It is when we consistently apply the tenets of the so-called "American Dream" that will begin to see real change, increases in the performance of all students, and the closing of educational achievement gaps for Latina/o and other students of color.

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