

Prepared by  
The Commission for Latino Educational Excellence  
Office of Mayor Joseph C. O'Brien  
Worcester, Massachusetts

# CREATING THE WILL:

A Community Roadmap to  
Achieving Educational Excellence  
for Latino Students in Worcester

*FAMILIES*

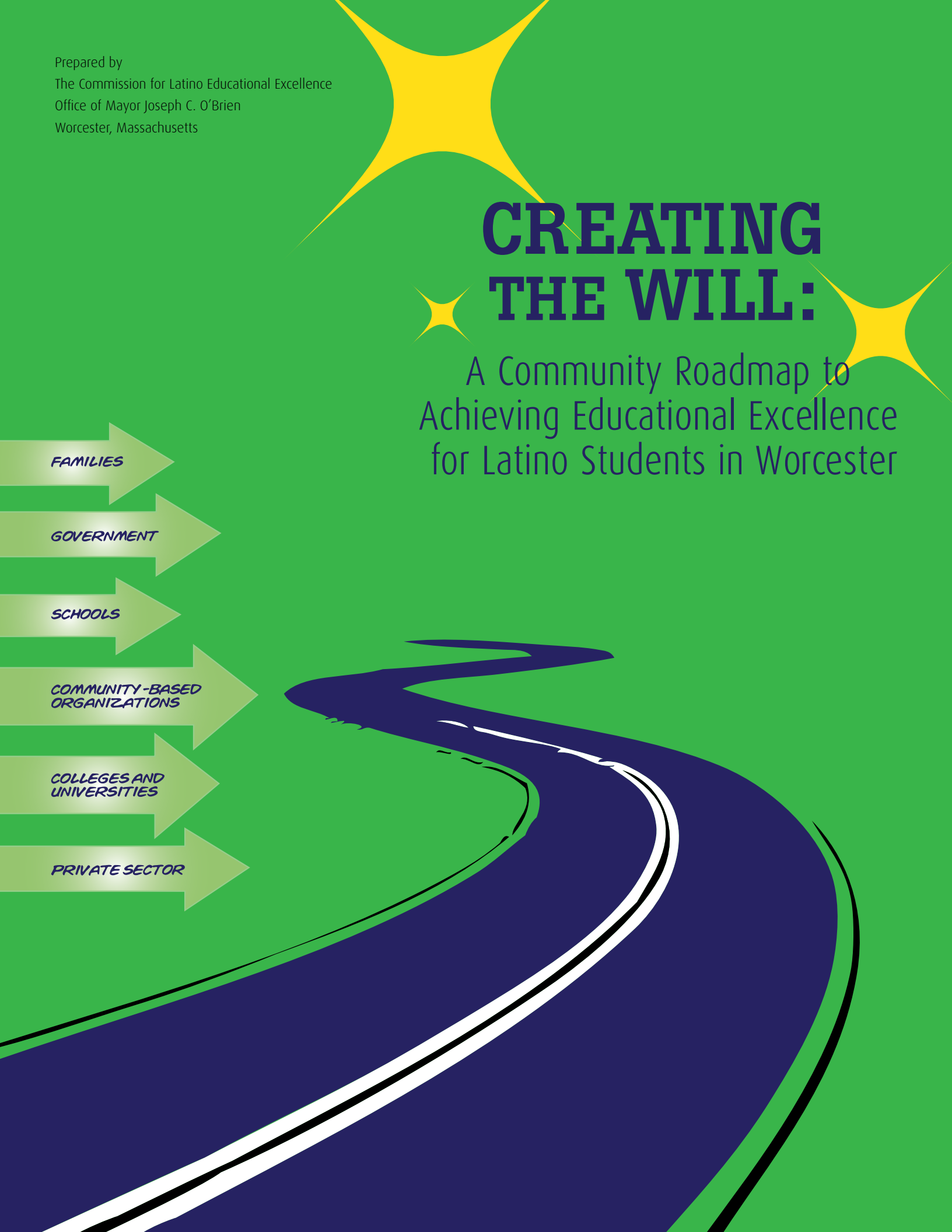
*GOVERNMENT*


*SCHOOLS*

*COMMUNITY-BASED  
ORGANIZATIONS*

*COLLEGES AND  
UNIVERSITIES*

*PRIVATE SECTOR*





July 1, 2011

The Honorable Joseph O'Brien  
Mayor, City of Worcester  
City Hall Room 305  
455 Main Street  
Worcester, MA 01608

Dear Mayor O'Brien:

We are pleased to present the final report of the Commission for Latino Educational Excellence, in response to your charge to study issues affecting the academic success of Latino children in the Worcester Public Schools.

We commend you for your leadership in constituting a commission to analyze the progress of Latino students, who now comprise 40% of the enrollment in Worcester's public schools and whose academic challenges are well documented in the demographic data. The work of the schools to lift the performance of all students cannot be accomplished in a vacuum; rather it requires a partnership with others in our community, with specific attention to the multiple and varied causes of the failure of students to thrive in our schools.

We recognize the urgency of closing the achievement gap. An increasing population of Latino students, coupled with chronic educational underachievement, threatens the socioeconomic and civic fabric of Worcester. According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Employment Projections 2006–2016, issued by the state's Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Massachusetts economy is projected to expand 6.3% by 2016, generating 216,650 new jobs. Approximately 60% of all net new jobs created from economic growth between 2006 and 2016 will require an associate's degree or higher. Yet today, 33% of Latino students in Worcester Public Schools are not expected to graduate from high school.

This sense of urgency led the Commission to focus on the collection of local data, via community hearings, best practice research, and open, honest dialogue with the administration of the Worcester Public Schools, to identify strategies for improving educational outcomes for Latino students.

The current challenges facing Latino children often include English language skills deficits, disproportionate socio-economic challenges, and a lack of early educational supports, placing such children at an educational deficit even before kindergarten. Notwithstanding the seriousness of these constraints, Commissioners also focused on the inherent assets embedded in many Latino families—bilingualism, strong family bonds, and a deep desire to provide the next generation with improved life opportunities.

The Commission's analysis is that the challenges facing Latino children in Worcester are not dissimilar to those facing low income children of color in most urban school systems in our country, and are exacerbated by communication challenges that too often disconnect parents from school personnel. Accordingly, the recommendations of this report are not intended to cast blame on personnel in the Worcester Schools but rather to introduce recommendations, based on national research into a range of best practice models in urban education, specific to the success of Latino children.

Indeed, the Commission found examples of successful practices at the classroom, school, and district level that—if reinforced and replicated—have the potential to begin to close the achievement gap.

Despite these pockets of excellence, we do not believe that the vision of safe and well-built schools with access to technology; families actively engaged in the acquisition of education, academically strong teachers who believe in the future of all their students; content that provides students with the reading, math, and science skills that prepare them for higher education and the workforce; is the reality for enough of our students.

As in most American schools, children in Worcester, who are from a Latino background, encounter content, teachers, and a school culture that is often foreign to their culture and experiences. This is counter to best practice evidence that effective teaching builds upon existing knowledge, on recognizable concepts and structures.

Students see few Latino professional role models within the workforce of the schools with whom they can readily identify or emulate. Consequently, they do not always view college or pathways into professional careers as attainable or viable goals.

Children in America's schools are not regularly exposed to the history, literature, or arts of non-English speaking cultures. As the predominant culture prevails almost exclusively, Latino children often acquire a misguided belief that their culture is not a legitimate part of the American experience. This can undermine a child's sense of self worth.

The recommendations in this report are intended to help guide further cross-cultural dialogue in Worcester, to improve communication and connections between Latino parents and the schools, and to augment the development of a healthy self concept for each and every child in the school system, recognizing that a critical underpinning for the growth and the development of children is strong self esteem.

Finally, the recommendations in this report are written by the Commission with a strong sense of urgency—a call to action in a timely fashion—recognizing that our civic viability is predicated on an equitable education system that produces lifelong learners ready to engage in the modern economy. Solutions can be tailored to create a model of excellence in urban education in Worcester, using our colleges, our schools, our families, and multiple agencies as resources within the community as tools and supports. One size fits all approaches, and the politics of inertia, must not impede the important work before us.

Again, the Commission thanks you for your leadership and stands ready collectively to mobilize community efforts for positive change as recommendations are considered and implemented.

Sincerely,

Gail E. Carberry, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair  
President,  
Quinsigamond Community College

Mary Jo Marion  
Co-Chair  
Executive Director,  
Latino Education Institute,  
Worcester State University



## References

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# Introduction

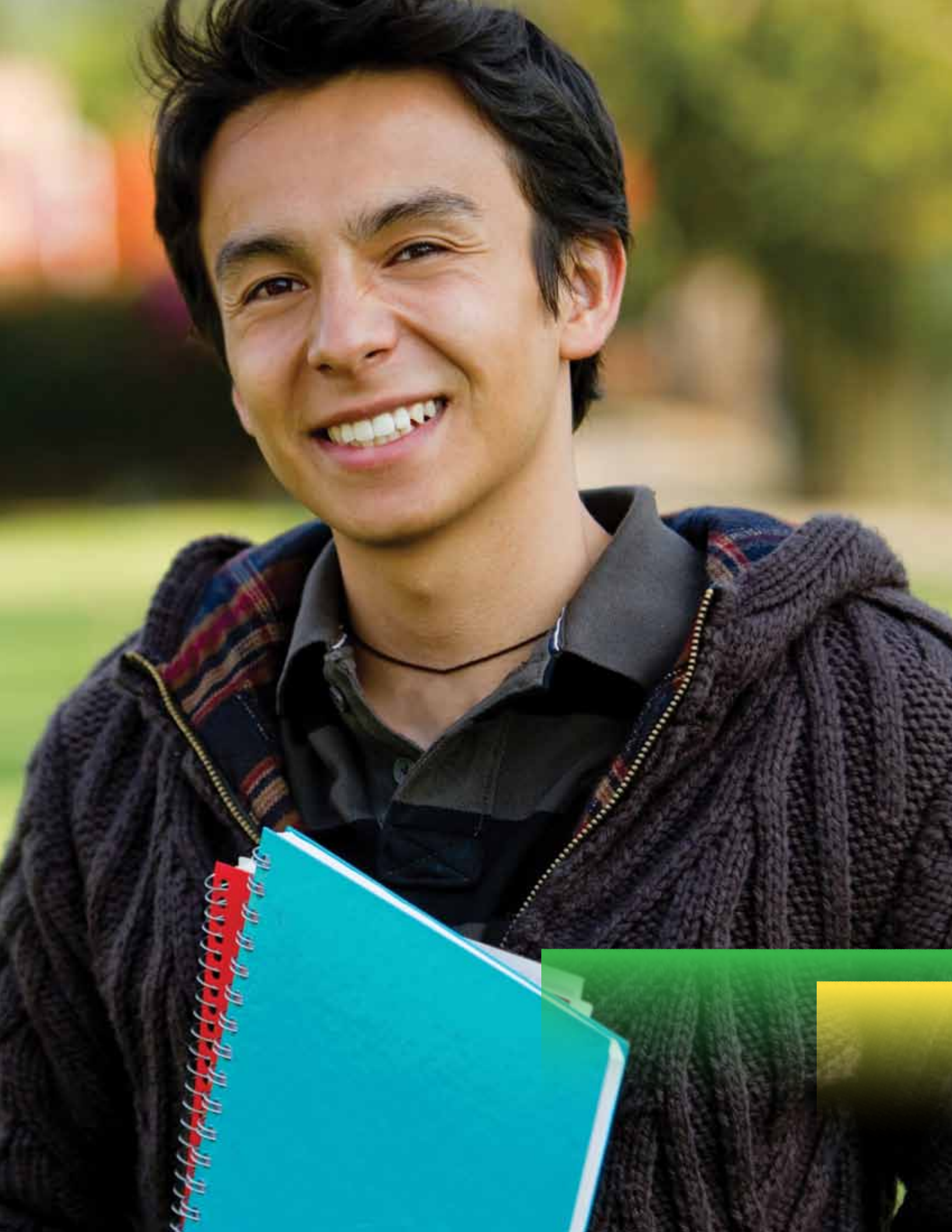
## **A** Rationale for a Focus on Latino Education

### National Perspective

The population of Latinos in the United States has grown substantially over the past two decades. Numbering approximately 22 million in 1990, the most recent U.S. Census data put the Latino population at more than 50 million, and Latinos now account for almost 17% of the U.S. population (Census, 2010). The changing racial and ethnic composition of the country is perhaps most visible in K-12 public schools. Nearly one in every four children currently attending public schools is Latino, and substantial increases in Latino school enrollment are expected to continue for decades (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Demographic projections suggest that by 2050 the school-aged population of Latinos will grow by more than

The unequal and inadequate educational gains among Latino youth that is documented in this report is a warning sign that we must heed if we are to bequeath a vibrant, resilient, and prosperous community to our children and grandchildren.





150%, and that Latino youth will then constitute a plurality of students in U.S. schools (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008).

Given the crucial role of public education in cultivating an engaged citizenry and a skilled workforce, there is mounting concern among educators, policy makers, community leaders, and employers that this substantial population growth among Latinos over the past decade has not been accompanied by progress in closing the achievement gap, as measured by the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP). While there are certainly Latino students who achieve academic success (Antróp-González et. al., 2005; Conchas, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006), nearly 24% of all Latino adults in the United States have less than a 9th grade education and almost one in four Latinos aged 16 to 24 is either not enrolled in high school or lacks a high school diploma (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Approximately half of all Latino students fail to complete high school within four years, and the majority of those who do are under prepared for the rigors of higher education (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Consequently, fewer than 13% of Latinos, nationally, are college graduates (Lopez, 2009). According to the organization Excelencia in Education, Latinos will have to earn 5.5 million degrees to close equity gaps and for the U.S. to become a world leader in college degree attainment among 25-64 year-olds by 2020 (*Roadmap for Ensuring America's Future, 2011*).

### Educational Circumstances of Latinos in Worcester

These national trends—substantial increases in the Latino population and disheartening academic outcomes—are also evident in Worcester, Massachusetts where the public schools serve over 23,000 students, pre-K to 12. Approximately 38% of this enrollment is comprised of Latino youth, numbering 8,948 (see table 1). Another high-risk group is English language learners (ELL), who comprise some 26% of enrollments in the Worcester Public Schools (WPS). It is important to note that not all ELL students are native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese; Worcester is home to large immigrant populations from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa as well as Latin America. Moreover, most students of Latino heritage in Worcester (60%) are English proficient (either multi- or mono-lingual) and so are not considered of Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Thus, while there is substantial overlap between the Latino and ELL student populations in Worcester (66% of ELLs self-identify as Latino), specific sections of this report are addressed to the needs of the latter group.

Although the charge of the Commission is to focus on Latino students, most of the recommendations made in this report are relevant to all students in need of service, encompassing many other subgroups which share characteristics with significant numbers of Latinos, such as ELLs of non-Latino heri-

Table 1. Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity: 2000-2011, WPS

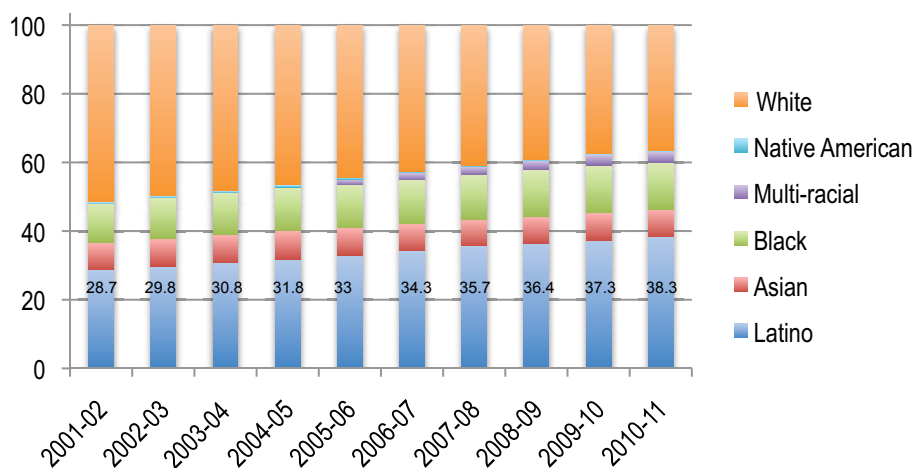




Table 2. Percent of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch by Race: 2010-2011, WPS

Student Population	Percent
Asian	67.9
Black	79.3
Latino	86.9
Native American	52.5
White	48.7

tage, non-Latino students of color, students eligible for free or reduced lunch (see table 2) and, in the case of undergraduates, all those who are the first in their families to attend college. It is precisely because Latino youth have the poorest educational outcomes of all WPS racial/ethnic subgroups that improvements for them can serve as a useful benchmark for the educational system as a whole.

At issue are both improved academic outcomes in general and the narrowing of the achievement gap between various student subgroups in specific. Along these lines, the Commission commends recent achievement gains for WPS students overall (see table 3) while, at the same time, calling for renewed attention to and prioritizing of initiatives designed to address the many obstacles that continue to impede the full realization of academic potential among Latino youth.

Table 3. CPI Achievement Gap: WPS vs. State; Latino Students, ELA and Mathematics

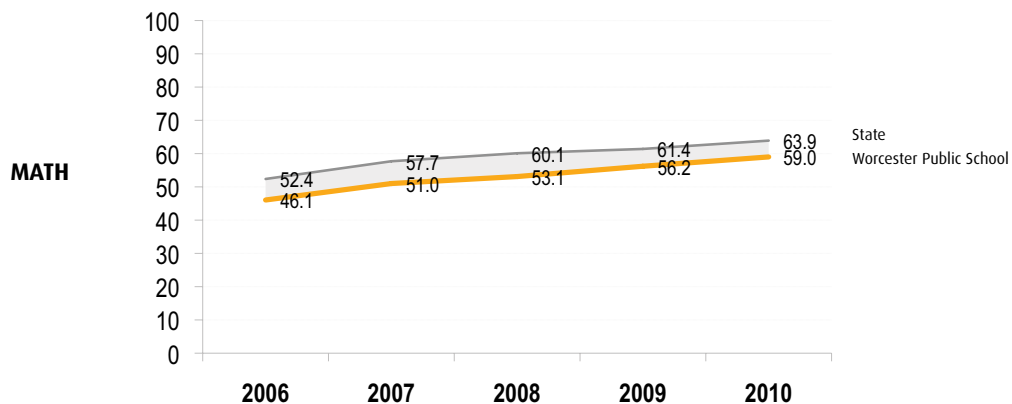
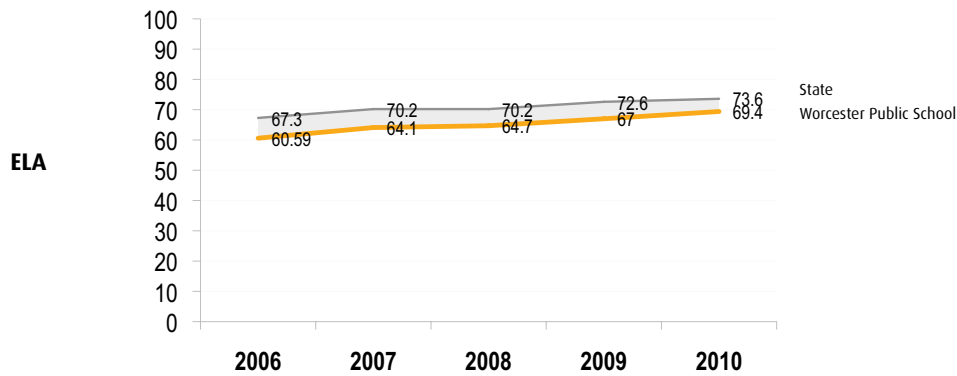


Table 4. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Race: 2008-2010

	2008	2009	2010
Asian	87.9	88.2	84.8
Black	73.5	79	76.5
Latino	64.6	63.6	67.4
Native American	70	60	77.8
White	75.4	76.2	78.2

The extent of the achievement gap between WPS Latino students and their peers has been documented via a number of measures:

- » Lowest four year graduation rate (67%) among all student groups, according to the most recent WPS data presented to the Commission (see table 4).
- » Latino students in Worcester are less likely to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) when compared to the aggregate student body, African American, or White students. AYP is a measure of the extent to which a student group demonstrates proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. AYP Reports are issued each year and show the progress schools and districts are making toward the goal of having all students reach proficiency by the year 2014. Schools have to make AYP in a subject for all student groups for two or more consecutive years.

Grades	English Language Arts: Meets Performance		Mathematics: Meets Performance	
	Aggregate	Hispanics	Aggregate	Hispanics
3-5	72.5%	62.6%	69%	58.9%
6-8	80.1%	73%	65.4%	55.4%
9-12	85.3%	80.6%	79%	70.9%

Source: Worcester: 2010 AYP DATA-by Grade Span.

- » For more comprehensive data related to the AYP, including participation, improvement, attendance/graduation rate go to the following link: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ayp/ayp\\_report/district.aspx?linkid=30&orgtypecode=5&fycode=2010&orgcode=03480000&ayp\\_report\\_mode=DETAILED](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ayp/ayp_report/district.aspx?linkid=30&orgtypecode=5&fycode=2010&orgcode=03480000&ayp_report_mode=DETAILED)
- » A significant proportion of Latino students at all grade levels scored in the Needs Improvement (NI), or Warning/Failing (W/F) categories on a series of MCAS tests (see table 5).

Compounding these bleak educational outcomes are low levels of engagement, as measured by a disproportionate rate of out-of-school suspensions in Worcester (11.3%) compared to 5.3% in the state as a whole. For Latino students, the rate in Worcester is also higher (15.1%) than at the state level (10.5%) (Gastón Institute). Low levels of engagement are further reflected in the high truancy rates 6.15 for Latino students compared with 4.97 for all WPS students; and high absentee rates of 7.11 for Latino students compared with 5.75 for all students (WPS Data).

Even among the 67% of WPS Latino students who graduate from high school, a disproportionate number are ill-prepared to pursue higher education. Recent WPS-provided data indicate that under 18% of WPS students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and only some 24% of students in Honors courses are Latino, compared with their 38% share of the total student body (see table 6).

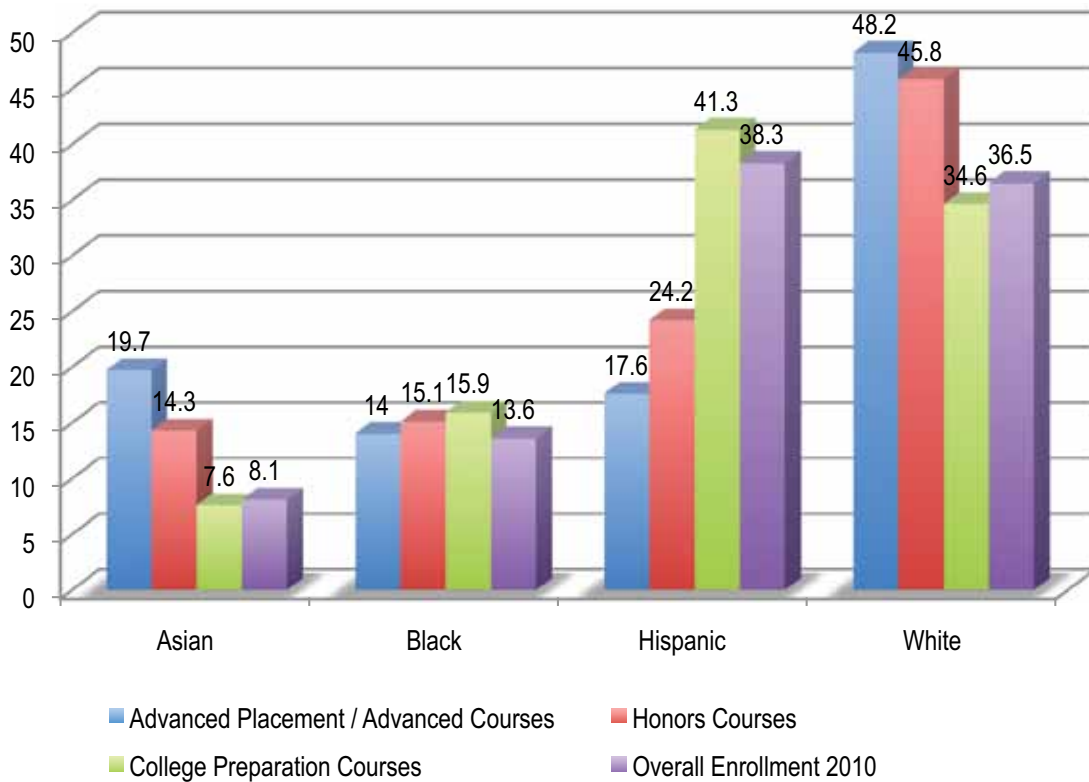
In short, an increasing population of Latino students coupled with chronic educational underachievement in this group threatens the socioeconomic and civic fabric of Worcester. According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Employment Projections 2006-2016, issued by the state's Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Massachusetts economy is projected to expand 6.3% by 2016, generating 216,650 new jobs. Approximately 60% of all net new jobs created from economic growth between 2006 and 2016 will require an associate's degree or higher. It is imperative that Worcester residents become better prepared for higher education so that they and the city as a whole can prosper in the new economy.

Table 5. MCAS English Language Arts and Math Proficiency Rates, WPS, Latino Students, 2009

MCAS results	Reading/English Language Arts		Mathematics		Science/Technology	
	NI	W/F	NI	W/F	NI	W/F
Hispanic/Latino						
Grade 3	50%	22%	40%	31%	--	--
Grade 4	44%	33%	46%	31%	--	--
Grade 5	39%	32%	33%	41%	46%	37%
Grade 6	34%	22%	28%	36%	--	--
Grade 7	41%	21%	30%	50%	--	--
Grade 8	32%	19%	33%	48%	38%	49%
Grade 10	41%	8% F	37%	50% F	42%	18% F
All Grades	40%	23%	35%	37%	--	--

Source: Worcester 2010 MCAS Results by Subgroup

Table 6. Grade 9-12 Course Enrollments vs. Overall Enrollment by Race: 2010



## Commission: Emergence and Charge

Concerned with the underachievement of Latino students in Worcester, community organizations and leaders conceived of and advocated for the constitution of a Commission for Latino Educational Excellence to bring attention, talent, and clout to efforts promoting educational excellence in Worcester.

The inspiration for the Commission was a national model that has proven very effective in advancing Latino educational outcomes—the White House Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, which has existed since 1990 under the First Bush Administration, continuing through the Clinton Administration, the Second Bush Administration, and the Obama Administration. The National Commission identifies promising practices in the education of Latino students and expands the base of stakeholders invested in improving education, including religious organizations, the business community, and families.

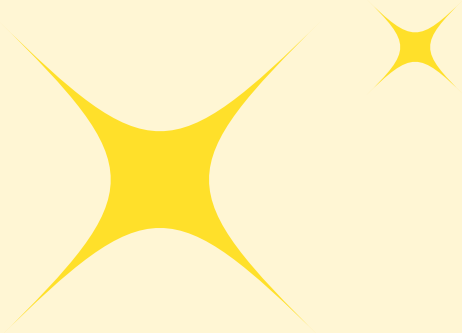
The series of events leading to the formation of the Commission began with an October 20, 2009 Candidates Forum sponsored by Adelante Worcester where all the candidates for School Committee were asked whether they would support the formation of a Commission for Latino Educational Excellence; all present publicly supported the idea. Subsequently, in March 2010, Mayor Joseph C. O'Brien and many of the same School Committee members were asked at a conference sponsored by the Latino Education Institute and the College of the Holy Cross whether they would endorse the formation of a Commission, to which all answered affirmatively.

The effort to establish a Commission was greatly aided when, in the fall of 2010, Worcester School Committee member John Monfredo put forth a motion to establish a Commission for Latino Educational Excellence. Ultimate credit for following through on the initiative belongs to Mayor O'Brien who, in December 2010, formally established the Mayoral Commission on Latino Educational Excellence and charged the Commission with examining the underlying causes of the achievement gap between Latino students and their peers and issuing a report. In addition, the Commission is charged with providing guidance on effective community outreach and potential partnership programs.

Specifically, the Commission agreed to provide advice to the Mayor and produce a written report on the following:

1. Progress of Latino students enrolled in the Worcester Public Schools in closing the academic achievement gap and attaining the goals established by two federal programs, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.
2. Development, monitoring, and coordination of efforts to promote high-quality education for Latino students.
3. Identification of ways to increase parental, private sector, and community involvement in improving education for Latino students.
4. Identification of innovative educational strategies to maximize the effectiveness of education for Latino students.
5. Identification of systemic impediments that hinder the effectiveness of educational initiatives for Latino students.

While the focus of the report is on Latinos, implications are far-reaching and speak to the needs of other communities that have traditionally been under served in the educational system. As with the proverbial canary in the coal mine, we need to think of conditions for Worcester's Latino youth as a harbinger of the future educational and economic health of the civic body as a whole. The unequal and inadequate educational gains among Latino youth that is documented in this report is a warning sign that we must heed if we are to bequeath a vibrant, resilient, and prosperous community to our children and grandchildren.



The Commission is chaired by Dr. Gail Carberry, President of Quinsigamond Community College and Mary Jo Marion, Executive Director of the Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University. The following is a list of Commissioners:

Mark Bilotta	<i>Colleges of Worcester Consortium</i>
Melinda Boone	<i>Superintendent, Worcester Public Schools</i>
Ramón Borges-Méndez	<i>Clark University</i>
Gail Carberry	<i>President, Quinsigamond Community College</i>
Jennifer Davis Carey	<i>Worcester Educational Collaborative</i>
Matilde Castiel	<i>UMass Memorial/Latin American Health Alliance</i>
Edith Claros	<i>Massachusetts College of Pharmacy</i>
Maritza Cruz	<i>Adelante Worcester, Hispanics/Latinos of Central MA</i>
Monica Escobar Lowell	<i>UMass Memorial Health Care</i>
Déborah L. González	<i>Quinsigamond Community College</i>
Paul Hernandez	<i>Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center</i>
Jason Irizarry	<i>University of Connecticut and Gastón Institute UMB</i>
Miguel Lopez	<i>Adelante Worcester, Hispanics/Latinos of Central MA</i>
Mary Jo Marion	<i>Latino Education Institute WSU</i>
Judith McGuire Robinson	<i>Anna Maria College</i>
Sandra Medina-Vazquez	<i>Parent Liaison</i>
John Monfredo	<i>WPS School Committee</i>
Jeffrey Mulqueen	<i>Chief Academic Officer, Worcester Public Schools</i>
Tracy Novick	<i>WPS School Committee</i>
Niurka Ortiz	<i>Radio Sol</i>
Daisy Rivera	<i>Worcester Juvenile Court</i>
Sergio Paez	<i>Worcester Public Schools</i>
David Perda	<i>Chief Research and Accountability Officer, Worcester Public Schools</i>
Margarita Perez	<i>Worcester State University</i>
Hilda Ramirez	<i>Worcester Youth Center</i>
Sarai Rivera	<i>Christian Community Church</i>
Carmen Rosado	<i>Worcester Public Schools</i>
Mario Silva-Rosa	<i>Assumption College</i>
Cynthia Stone	<i>College of the Holy Cross</i>
Jeff Turgeon	<i>Central Mass Workforce Investment Board</i>
Marcela Uribe-Jennings	<i>Worcester State University</i>

## B Executive Summary

The work of the Commission has encompassed research, deliberations, a public hearing, and direct testimony. The Commission found that, despite troubling outcomes for WPS Latino students, Worcester is home to exceptional schools, cutting edge strategies, and district-wide programs that boost academic achievement for Latinos and other traditionally under served students. Descriptions of a number of these “Profiles in Success” can be found throughout this report. While by no means comprehensive, they illustrate some of the valuable initiatives currently underway in Worcester that will need to be scaled up if we are to make progress in closing the achievement gap.

Given the many noteworthy success stories in Worcester, why has closing the achievement gap proven so difficult? The Commission posits that it is not the individual characteristics of students and parents. There are too many examples of schools that have succeeded with economically disadvantaged students and those with limited English skills for the Commission to believe that it cannot be done. Nor do we question the dedication of teachers and administrators, who too often struggle alone to address inequities whose solutions require collaboration among all stakeholders.

What is needed is coordination and synergy, the bringing together of families, public schools, institutions of higher education, government—at multiple levels—community-based organizations, and the private sector, which too often labor in isolation. We say this with a deep appreciation for how difficult this sort of collaboration is—particularly the concomitant consensus building it necessitates across diverse groups of people, communities, and organizations. Yet we also know that viable models for such collaboration and team work exist, including the work of this Commission.

This report is designed to address how each of the entities itemized above, alone and in collaboration, can advance three goals identified by the Commission in response to the Mayor’s charge:

- 1. Improve educational experiences for Latino and other under served youth of Worcester.**
- 2. Improve educational outcomes for those students who are falling behind disproportionately.**
- 3. Increase academic rigor to prepare more students for higher education and advanced career opportunities.**

## C Action Plan

Gaps in achievement are most often reflective of gaps in opportunity. Just as the problem of the achievement gap is multifaceted, so too are the solutions required to address it. The Commission recognizes that there are no simple or single solutions or quick-fixes for eliminating inequities and gaps in educational achievement for Latino students in Worcester. We believe the recommendations herein, while powerful and important, are only a first step. What is needed to jump start the process of closing the achievement gap is a concerted short-term action plan involving all sectors of the community and designed to impact large numbers of students.

Worcester is fortunate, to that end, to have dedicated partners committed to the following high leverage actions in the next 12 months:

- » **The Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University** has pledged to produce and widely distribute an annual report card measuring progress towards closing the achievement gap between Latino and other students in WPS as outlined in this report. It will highlight the efforts of the entire community in conjunction with the schools in achieving this goal. Each year this report will be presented to the school committee, local legislators, and WPS leadership.
- » **The United Way of Central Massachusetts** is convening agencies working with families, schools, and funders to examine how to prepare children and families for school-readiness and prepare systems to receive them. Worcester needs an approach similar to the California First Five, LA First Five, and Boston’s Thrive in Five—model programs which facilitate the collaboration of all agencies serving children, birth through kindergarten—to bring together a fractured field of early education providers with marginalized families that too often do not partake in early education opportunities.
- » **The Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education at Clark University** is deeply invested in the development and documentation of potentially transformative initiatives, including the establishment of 5 Innovation Schools and the Main South Promise Neighborhood Initiative.
- » In recognition of the learning potential for all students in dual language immersion programs and the concomitant



## Profiles in Success

need for fidelity to the six-year learning model, **WPS has agreed to work with the Commission on the development of an implementation plan** to ensure dual language programs have the resources needed (learning materials, professional development, enrichment activities, community mentors, and sufficient staffing) to successfully produce academically capable, bilingual, bicultural, and bi-literate students. The plan would also explore expanding dual language immersion opportunities for all students in Worcester.

- » In recognition of the fact that families are the first and most important educators in the lives of children, **Adelante Worcester, the Worcester Youth Center, and the Latino Education Institute** have agreed to jointly hold Family Academies designed to inform, train, and empower Latino families to become better advocates for their children and for the public school system at large.
- » **The Worcester Consortium of Colleges** has agreed
- » to explore the development of an initiative to create a college-to-WPS mentoring and tutoring program on every campus in Worcester, so that all WPS schools are linked to Worcester's 30,000 college students.
- » **The Worcester Education Collaborative** is convening community organizations including businesses, education, youth service organizations and others with a vested interest in education to align their efforts in support of high student achievement, safe and welcoming schools, family and parent engagement, and communication. This will be accomplished through the Education Roundtable, the Community Accountability Framework, and the Community Agreement.

## Dual Language Immersion

Dual language programs are the most effective way of closing the achievement gap for English language learners (ELLs). In 2004, Virginia P. Collier and Wayne P. Thomas from George Mason University published an eighteen-year longitudinal study of dual language programs in twenty-three school districts and fifteen states. They concluded that, unlike other methods of teaching ELLs, dual language immersion fully closes the achievement gap between ELLs and native speakers of English over time. Currently three Worcester elementary schools—Norrback, Roosevelt, and Chandler Magnet—offer dual language immersion programs.

These programs promote bilingualism for all students, close the achievement gap for ELLs, and create a positive school culture. This teaching method challenges all students to become fluent in two languages. Each class is taught by two teachers, in two languages, hence no translation or repeated lessons are needed. Native English speakers and ELLs learn a second language together with no stigma attached.

Bilingualism for all students is a major advantage in an increasingly global economy. In many affluent Massachusetts communities language immersion programs are a major draw in attracting and retaining the participation of middle and upper income families in the public schools. The Commission believes well-implemented programs in Worcester can have a similar effect. Positive school culture is enhanced when multiple languages and heritages are visibly affirmed and respected; camaraderie among students can bridge class and language differences; teachers report higher levels of job satisfaction; parents from both language groups participate more actively in schools.

Worcester Public Schools should be commended for increasing the number of schools and students benefitting from these programs.

# Goal 1:

## Improve the educational experiences of Latino youth in Worcester

### **A** Introduction

Local voices, amplified through Commission meetings and public hearings, echo national data and suggest that curriculum content and the delivery of information need to be modified to more effectively meet the needs of students. Although they represent a large percentage of students locally and nationally, Latino students are still underrepresented in the curricula of most school districts. Students and other participants in public hearings call for culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning that build on the “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (Gay, 2000; p. 29). Also referred to as “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings 1990), “culturally congruent” (Au and Kawakami 1994), and “culturally compatible” (Jacob and Jordan 1987), this approach to working with students of diverse backgrounds affirms the identities of students and builds upon who students are and what they bring with them to school. It teaches to and through their experiences.

The Commission is concerned that education outcomes are negatively impacted by insufficient cultural competence throughout the educational system.



Consistent with the goals of the Commission, the recommendations are rooted in an asset-based approach that seeks to build on the strengths of youth and their families as well as some of the successful initiatives that are already underway in the city. This requires transforming negative beliefs and perceptions into a positive and empowering approach that builds on Latino students' academic and social strengths. We recognize that this is hard work and requires examination of subtle barriers and institutional biases as well as the creative adaptation of pedagogical methods and curricula to changing student needs.

The social climate in the United States is increasingly fraught with anxiety and intolerance toward immigrants and non-native English speakers. Latino adolescents in particular—situated at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, between their parents' culture and the American mainstream—grapple with this complex reality as they define their identities and develop future aspirations. (McCarthy, 2010)

Given that Worcester is not immune to the tensions created by population shifts and political scapegoating, it is incumbent upon those who have a stake in the future of our city to invest more in policies and programs that have been proven to make a difference in the lives of Latino youth, as well as in initiatives that build community support and social cohesion. We must strengthen and empower more Latino families to engage with their children's teachers and school administrators as partners supporting high levels of academic achievement. We must also find more ways to promote positive engagement between youth and the broader community; for instance, by alleviating tensions between youth and police. These and other steps will strengthen our children, and in so doing, strengthen the fabric of our community and the professional capacity of our citizens.

The Commission is concerned that education outcomes are negatively impacted by insufficient cultural competence throughout the educational system. For students to be successful academically, they require opportunities to connect their language, culture, and experiences—their prior knowledge and home culture—with the new knowledge and cultural frameworks that are being taught in school. When families and communities have a culture and language markedly different from those of their children's schools, then curricula and pedagogy need to provide effective, cognitive bridges to facilitate learning (Reyes, 2008). This gap in cultural competency is especially common in large urban districts with a changing student population. Generally speaking, schools have been slow to respond

to what researchers have dubbed the "Latino Education Crisis" (Gandara & Contreras, 2010). To more effectively address the complex and diverse needs of Latino students, the Commission calls for increased professional development aimed at improving the cultural competence of teachers, administrators, and other school personnel from pre-school through higher education, with particular emphasis on culturally responsive approaches to working with Latino youth.

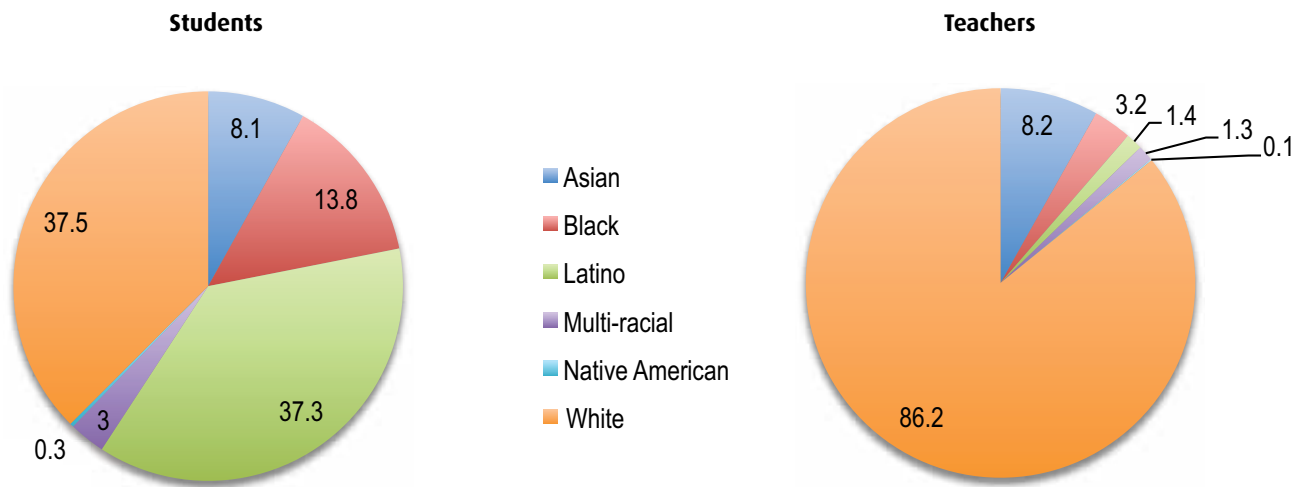
While it is certainly the case that culturally responsive teachers can be found across all racial and ethnic groups and that all teachers are capable of improving their cultural competence, it is hard to imagine significant progress being made in this area without prioritizing the alarming disparity between the current racial/ethnic profile of students in the WPS compared to the racial/ethnic profile of their teachers (see table 7).

Currently, Latinos are the most under-represented group in the WPS teacher workforce as compared to their share of the Worcester population (22%) and the student population (38%). They comprise 1.4% of teachers and 5.7% of administrators (WPS Data). The under representation of Latinos in the education workforce is a lost opportunity because teachers of color tend to hold higher expectations for students of color (Romo & Falbo, 1997; Yeo, 1997), are more likely to value the knowledge and cultural frames of reference students "bring to school" (Irvine, 1989; Monzó & Rueda, 2001), and typically enter the profession with a heightened awareness of the sociopolitical contexts in which students of color are educated (Beaubeouf-LaFontant, 1999; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). They are also more likely to work in "hard to staff" schools and have greater retention rates in those settings (Villegas 2007; Villegas, 2009; Irizarry & Donaldson, In Press).

We call for professional development that ensures the use of institutional practices that acknowledge, affirm, and build upon the wealth of cultural resources that non-traditional students and teachers bring with them to school. Research documenting the characteristics of effective pedagogical practices highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogies informed by connections to students' communities (Irizarry, 2011), as opposed to "deficit" approaches to working with Latino youth, which define students by what they may lack (i.e. financial resources, English proficiency, etc.).



Table 7. Student vs. Teacher Racial/Ethnic Profiles, WPS, 2009



## B Recommendations

Stakeholders invested in making education more culturally responsive to the academic and social needs of all students can take the following actions:

### Families Can

- » Become engaged as active partners in the educational success of their children both at home and through increased connections to schools and advocacy communities.
- » Develop their children’s proficiency in the family’s native language or languages. This is especially important for non-English speaking families in the U.S., many of whom face misguided social pressure to “give up” languages other than English. Research has demonstrated conclusively that knowing more than one language is a cognitive asset (Hakuta & Garcia, 1989; Bialystok et. al., 2004 and 2007) and that proficiency in a first language (L1) promotes academic success in a second language (L2) (August & Garcia, 1988; Bialystok, 2001; Hakuta, 1995). Moreover, the loss of a child’s home language can be detrimental both to self

esteem and to a sense of connection to family and community.

- » “Recognize that individual differences exist in how children whose home language is not English acquire English. For example, some children may experience a silent period (of six or more months) while they acquire English; other children may practice their knowledge by mixing or combining languages (for example, ‘Mi mama me put on mi coat’); still other children may seem to have acquired English-language skills (appropriate accent, use of vernacular vocabulary, and grammatical rules) but are not truly proficient; yet some children will quickly acquire English-language proficiency. Each child’s way of learning a new language should be viewed as acceptable, logical, and part of the ongoing development and learning of any new language” (*Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, 1995).
- » Discuss with their children’s teachers and other school personnel how they might contribute to cultural programming in the classroom.
- » Consider enrolling their children in a Dual Immersion Program.
- » Take advantage of existing programs to learn English, usually identified by the acronyms ESL (English as a Second Language) or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

## Colleges and Universities Can

- » Work with WPS to design and to offer professional development that is tailored to local needs, cost-effective, and easily delivered to teachers.
- » Collaborate among Worcester Consortium institutions to provide oversight and coordination for undergraduate and graduate students serving as mentors in Worcester schools.
- » Find ways to use work study money to allow undergraduates receiving financial aid to dedicate more time to off-campus commitments.
- » Develop programs for bilingual undergraduate and graduate students to serve as interpreters during parent teacher conferences in the WPS.
- » Deepen mechanisms for integrating academic coursework with initiatives that extend beyond the classroom, including incorporating community-based learning and internship experiences into curricular requirements.
- » Partner with schools to offer initiatives similar to the Hispanic Writers in the Schools Program, directed by UMass-Boston in collaboration with community-based agencies. The writers offer students alternatives and fresh ways of understanding and reacting to their experiences and can speak convincingly of the importance of language in expressing feelings and emotions and the power of the written word to communicate to others the important issues facing them as individuals and as members of the community.
- » Develop plans to better address both the challenges and opportunities presented by changing undergraduate student populations, especially in view of the growing numbers of Latinos enrolled at colleges and universities in the Worcester Consortium. At the College of the Holy Cross, for instance, 24% of incoming students in the class of 2014 were ALANA (African-American, Latin American, Asian-American, and/or Native American), the majority of whom (59%) self-identified as “Hispanic” or “multinational.” Moreover, 18.7% of students in the Holy Cross class of 2014 indicated they were the first in their family to attend college. These numbers reflect an 84.6% increase over the past ten years with respect to ALANA students.
- » Identify and promote grant opportunities for faculty to conduct research in best practices in culturally-responsive

education and integrate their findings into teacher preparedness programs.

- » Identify opportunities to offer dual college/high school credit career courses during school hours to ensure students have the opportunity to connect academic coursework with relevant real-world future career pathways.

## Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Work with civil rights organizations to establish Know Your Rights campaigns for students and families.
- » Collaborate with Worcester Consortium institutions on ways to make their curricula and campus climates better adapted to their changing student populations.
- » Work with cultural institutions (including libraries and museums) to facilitate cultural connections for the city as a whole. For example, the Latino Festival sponsored by Centro las Américas every year has a specific art and cultural component that highlights the contributions of Latino artists. This could be integrated more closely with WPS.
- » Work with WPS and Worcester Consortium institutions to promote education related to the negative impacts of linguistic and cultural stereotyping.
- » Continue to offer Family Academies, in collaboration with Worcester Consortium institutions and WPS, to educate parents on how to navigate the WPS system, become educational advocates for their children, access available educational opportunities, etc.
- » In collaboration with schools and institutions of higher education, actively recruit Latino and other traditionally underserved students to a Future Teachers Club that would provide exposure to the field and support for young people in Worcester interested in careers in teaching.
- » Collaborate with WPS on the initiatives listed below involving the hiring of more culturally responsive and minority teachers, outreach to Latino parents, design of cultural competence training programs and school climate surveys, and capitalizing on the opportunities presented by dual-language programs.



## Profiles in Success

### Schools Can

- » Conduct school climate surveys every 3 to 4 years for each school and use them to assess and build on the effectiveness of current programs.
- » Mandate cultural competence training programs linked to evidence-based outcomes and implement them system-wide. Enhancing professional development opportunities for WPS faculty and staff has the potential to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for all youth.
- » Continue to develop the wrap-around service coordinator positions established in 5 schools and expand the functions of this position district wide.
- » Prioritize outreach to Latino parents. Because many Latino parents are not comfortable speaking English and are not familiar with the school system in this country, schools must make special efforts to encourage them to attend meetings and ensure that they are generally made to feel welcome. At a minimum, schools should have an individual who can translate from English to Spanish and Spanish to English in attendance at every school meeting, including PTA meetings, and make such a person available for any parent-teacher conferences or counselor meetings with Latino parents.
- » Expand the Worcester Future Teachers Academy Program (WFTA), currently only offered at Worcester South High School, to recruit more talented Latino students and to include more opportunities for students to engage in workshops at the college level and to work with teachers in the WPS.
- » Capitalize on the advantages offered by the district's dual language programs. One successful model that could be replicated is a program between Brockton Public Schools and UMass-Boston that combines ELL certification for instructors with family engagement. This professional development is designed to include teachers and families working together, thus promoting instructional improvement and cultural competency.

## Innovation Schools

Worcester is the only school district in Massachusetts to have established multiple Innovation Schools. These include: Chandler Magnet School, Goddard School of Science and Technology, Goddard Scholars Academy, University Park Campus School, and Woodland Academy. Latinos comprise more than 50% of all students in 4 of the 5 schools. Thus, the Commission identified this development as particularly promising for Latino students in Worcester.

The Innovation Schools initiative, created as part of the Education Reform Act of 2010, seeks to give educators and public schools the same types of flexibility afforded to Charter Schools, while remaining in-district schools. The greater autonomy and flexibility is in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing, professional development, and school district policies to improve learning outcomes for all students and reduce achievement gaps.

The five new Innovation Schools were developed at the school level, most in partnership with higher education partners. Each will implement different strategies to close the achievement gap. For example, Chandler Magnet School will provide dual-language instruction in Spanish and English; the Goddard Scholars Academy targets highly motivated middle school students; and University Park Campus School seeks to increase college and career readiness among students.

## Government Can

- » Encourage communities, school districts, and institutions of higher education to develop strong, collaborative K-16 educational strategies to improve Latino achievement throughout the educational pipeline.
- » Ensure that all city employees receive cultural competence training linked to evidence-based outcomes.
- » Monitor the effectiveness of evidence-based cultural competence training, in collaboration with WPS, community-based organizations, and local colleges and universities.
- » Form an ad hoc committee to review WPS hiring practices, with a view to articulating goals for the recruitment of culturally responsive and minority teachers.
- » Allocate financial resources to paraprofessional programs that build on the cultural competency of teacher's aides; by 2012, offer them a pathway to teaching licensure.
- » Allocate more funding for ESL/ESOL programs so that non-English speaking parents can better help their children to succeed academically.
- » Hold schools accountable for meeting their benchmarks for the hiring of new teachers. Assess the effectiveness of current recruitment strategies by reviewing outcomes and inputs/expenditures. Make certain that community involvement is part of the strategy for minority teacher recruitment, as stated in the WPS strategic plan.
- » Review the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WPS and WPD related to safety officers placed in certain high schools. Make certain that the stated purpose and job description clearly delineates the difference between law enforcement and school discipline. The Commission is concerned about the growing number of young people in schools developing criminal records as a result of law enforcement responding to events occurring in schools
- » Request an annual report from the schools detailing the number of expulsions and out-of-school suspensions by race and ethnicity and type of violation. Then, follow through by spearheading efforts to incentivize schools to reduce these numbers.

## Private Sector Can

- » Partner with schools, colleges and universities to offer opportunities for students to integrate their academic and career interests.
- » Increase employee representation on the boards of community-based organizations.
- » Invite members of the Latino community to serve on—or in advisory capacity to—corporate task forces that bear on civic and educational issues.
- » Work towards the goal of increasing the representation of Latino businesses in local trade associations.
- » Increase sponsorship of cultural events in the city.

# Profiles in Success

## Promise Neighborhoods

The non-profit sector, local institutions of higher education, and WPS have joined forces in Worcester and secured a planning grant from the federal Department of Education to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in the Main South neighborhood, and to transform this area through comprehensive and coordinated actions. Latino students are the majority population in Main South schools, and stand to gain from this initiative.

The one-year planning grant and subsequent implementation grant allow for the development and support of a diverse partnership of organizations and Main South community residents, especially youth and parents, to create a neighborhood-based strategic plan with a unified vision for the Main South community that will:

1. Advance neighborhood engagement and investment
2. Support efforts to improve outcomes that are communicated and analyzed on a continuous basis
3. Identify and increase capacity for programming focused on results from cradle to career
4. Build a continuum of solutions that include academic programs and family and community supports with effective schools at the center
5. Integrate programs and break down silos between agencies
6. Work with local government to sustain and scale up solutions and leverage additional funding and resources to support the plan

The United Way of Central Massachusetts, Clark University, and Main South CDC are the lead partners in this effort.

## Worcester Public Schools Wrap Around Strategy

WPS is piloting a wrap around strategy to build school capacity to systematically address students' non-academic barriers to learning, by connecting community resources to students and families in need. As of September 2011, five coordinators will be placed in 5 schools to facilitate two-way communication between the school and resource providers in the community, responding to shifts in needs and resources in ways that support students, from cradle to career, in reaching high levels of academic success and college and career readiness. Coordinators will manage community resources to support student success across four domains: 1) Academic, 2) College/Career, 3) Family/Community, and 4) Health/Wellness.

## Goal 2:

### Improve educational outcomes for Latino youth in Worcester

#### **A** Early Education

Empirical studies have proven that investments in high-quality early learning are among the most cost-effective of any investments along the educational pipeline, returning as high as 15 to 17 percent on the investment each year (*Creating the Will*, 2000). Yet, nationally, fewer than half of Latino children are enrolled in any early learning program. For a variety of reasons, Latino children are less likely than their African-American and non-Hispanic White peers to participate in early childhood education programs. Issues of affordability, availability, transportation and cultural preferences are common factors. As a result, Latino children often enter first grade reading at levels that lag behind those of their peers. Moreover, these achievement gaps are durable. Where students are grouped according to performance, Latino students may be “tracked” in lower levels throughout primary school and into secondary school.

The Commission found that despite troubling outcomes for Latino students in WPS, Worcester is home to exceptional schools, district-wide programs, and cutting edge strategies that enhance academic achievement for Latino and other students.





Research abounds that quality preschools and full-day kindergartens support children's academic attainment, especially for children at risk of being in the lowest quartile of literacy skills (Hutchinson-Gibbs, 2010; Hall-Kenyon et. al., 2009; Zvoch, 2009).

In responding to a court decree to provide universal preschool for all its children, New Jersey developed a model for "diverse delivery" providers including public schools, Head Start and child care centers, with the goal of "tap[ping] the unique assets that community-based providers bring" (Mead, 2009). In Elizabeth, New Jersey, where nearly 2/3 of the children are Latinos, all of the above mentioned stakeholders entered into a partnership to promote intensive literacy development in high quality settings, including elementary schools, community-based organizations and dual-language immersion programs. When they reviewed the 2005-2008 data for the third graders who had attended two years of preschool, 88% were found to be reading at grade level, better than the state-wide average of 86% (ibid.). Mead's report also explains how diverse systems coordinated staff training, curriculum implementation, and program monitoring.

An essential part of early education involves a definition of school readiness. School readiness research identifies broad areas that are significant predictors of academic success. These include "academic" domains such as cognition and language, as well as the social and emotional/behavioral development and physical health status of children. Since school readiness definitions are meant to capture the influences of quality preschool and family experiences that prepare children for formal schooling, Snow (2006) argues that community participation is essential in establishing agreed upon definitions of readiness. Without community participation, the experiences and values with which families socialize their children may be ignored or devalued. Without family engagement, the approaches that are devised might be insufficiently compatible with community norms.

While early intervention strategies are impressive, to address existing achievement gaps, they must also be accompanied by continuing academic enrichment opportunities throughout elementary and secondary school and beyond. "[O]nly with a prolonged intervention strategy that includes a combination of initiatives like preschool, full-day kindergarten, and annual supplementary instruction thereafter will schools be in a position to successfully combat long-term contextual challenges and produce uniformly high-achieving students" (Zvoch, 2009).

Stakeholders looking to accelerate the benefits of early education for Latino and other under served students can take the following actions:

### All Sectors Can

- » Support current efforts to create a Worcester-wide plan for early education that is comprehensive and responsive to the needs of all families.
- » Allocate more resources to the expansion of preschool, kindergarten and full day kindergarten in Worcester, given the cost effectiveness of early intervention efforts.
- » Encourage Latino families to enroll their children in pre-school programs.

### Families Can

- » Provide a safe, enriching, and stimulating environment for their children.
- » Recognize that they are their children's first teachers and enhance that role by singing to them, telling them stories, asking them open-ended questions and, most critically, reading to them every day, either in English or Spanish, or both. As with spoken language proficiency, research demonstrates that literacy skills developed in one language will transfer to a second language (Krashen, 1988; Bialystok, 2001; Hakuta, 1995).
- » Expose their children to numeracy and other basic skills such as counting from one to ten, manipulating concrete objects, and identifying shapes, colors, and letters.
- » Use the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist (or comparable checklist) as a practical tool for preparing their children for school.
- » Set high expectations for their children's academic success.
- » Become partners with school personnel and community organizations as early as possible in the educational process.
- » Use school and community resources to learn about the broad range of services available—from childcare to cultural programs to academic supports, among others—and to ensure that their children are benefitting from as many as would be useful to them.
- » Model behaviors that will improve the future educational



## Profiles in Success

success of their children, such as reading for pleasure, keeping up with current events, learning new skills, and participating actively in the community.

- » Expose their children to cultural opportunities available through local libraries, parks, museums, concerts, festivals, etc.
- » Seek out play groups for their children and other opportunities to help them practice their social skills and adaptability to non-family based expectations.
- » Enroll their children in pre-school programs to improve their school readiness.
- » Bear in mind that many children benefit from delayed enrollment in kindergarten, or from a second year of kindergarten.
- » Bring their pre-school child to the Worcester Public Library

### Colleges and Universities Can

- » Encourage undergraduate and graduate students—especially those with bilingual and bicultural competence—to pursue careers in early childhood education.
- » Expand academic opportunities in early childhood and bilingual education.
- » Create certification programs for Family Child Care providers.

### Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Increase the number of community-based preschools.
- » Look to supplement traditional programs like Head Start with models that cater to families which prefer to educate young children in the home. For example, home visitor programs that work directly with families on how to promote the development of their children. Also, infant and toddler programs that have center-based and home visitor approaches to program delivery. These are viable models, and are being implemented at the Harlem Children's Zone, Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Head Start and Dimmock Head Start in Boston.

## Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University

The Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Latinos in the city of Worcester, through education programs, civic engagement, and research. Now celebrating ten years of service to Latino families, the LEI was created in response to an action plan developed by the Worcester Working Coalition for Latino Students (WWCLS) in 1999 and with the support of key elected officials and through the leadership of Worcester State University.

Each year the institute reaches over 1000 youth and their families with education and advocacy programs that prepare students for and assist them through the college admission process, boost academic achievement in the elementary grades, increase English language proficiency for parents, build resiliency among middle schools girls, and prepare parents for participation in early education. Chief among its innovative strategies for serving Latino Families is the Family Academy—a weekend long gathering of Latino parents and children/students that builds knowledge and skills in the areas of educational advocacy, health and nutrition, issues of acculturation, career development, and self-advocacy.

- » Reach out to local Family Child Care providers. Worcester has an established cadre of Latinas who are state licensed and nationally credentialed and are supervised to provide care to infants and preschoolers and also after school care.
- » Recognize that collaborations among organizations are necessary to ensure that children and families are ready for school, and to establish systems (including schools) that are ready to receive and to teach them. The California First Five, LA First Five, and Boston's Thrive in Five programs are models for coordination and collaboration between all of the agencies serving children, from birth through kindergarten.
- » Compile statistics missing from currently available data sources, including information related to informal child care networks in Worcester and the numbers of Latino families who have access to day care, Head Start and public school preschool programs, so that we can begin to chart and track the academic status of Latino children who receive these services with those whose first school experiences are in kindergarten or first grade.
- » Replicate summer transitional kindergarten programs found to support children's transitions and school experiences in kindergarten. These programs include parent education as well as coordination among preschool and public school programs. It is especially important to target ELLs and their families, and children who have not had a preschool experience. The Long Island Children's Museum and California's Kickoff to Kindergarten are two model programs that target readiness in areas traditionally found lacking and that are critical for school success.

### Schools Can

- » Host Countdown to Kindergarten community play groups. "These Play to Learn Play groups bring together parents, children and early childhood professionals in free sessions that include educational play, circle time, snack, time to share information about resources and activities, gross motor and sensory play, goodbye circle" (countdowntokindergarten.org). Examples include ReadBoston's Reading Trail Lending Library and the East Boston Early Education Center Playgroup. The location of these programs in public schools and libraries has the added benefit of helping parents become accustomed to these settings and comfortable

interacting with educational personnel.

- » Increase the number of school-based preschools, in line with a growing movement in urban communities across the country. When structured effectively, these programs have been shown to substantially decrease the gap in both access to and participation in early education resources and opportunities.
- » Improve outreach to immigrant parents of young children so that they are aware of available resources to help their children attain school readiness.
- » Look for funding to establish a program where teachers in the primary grades visit the home, along the lines of an initiative currently underway in Springfield, Massachusetts.
- » Openly recruit pre-school students at all promise neighborhood and other elementary innovation school sites. Priority would be given to those students who live in the school district.

### Government Can

- » Collect data on poverty, housing, nutrition, and health status of children in Worcester and establish objectives for their improvement. These are important factors that affect academic achievement. Sources that model the use of such data to improve early childhood education outcomes include Bowman et. al. (2000) and Snow (2006).
- » Increase funding for low-income students to attend pre-school programs.
- » Provide transportation for pre-school programs. The lack of adequate transportation was identified by Latino parents in Worcester as the main barrier for participation during the public hearing convened by the Commission.
- » Increase funding for summer school programs targeting low-income children. Research has documented that "summer fall-back" among disadvantaged children is strong enough to erase gains made during the school year (Zvoch, 2009).
- » Convene a task force, to include the directors of health agencies, Head Start, Worcester Family Partners, Edward St. Center, Worcester Public Library, United Way, and other groups, to look for ways of expanding opportunities for pre-school students, modeled on successful practices in other cities such as LA First Five and Boston's Thrive in Five.

## Private Sector Can

- » Offer more work-site early education and child care centers.
- » Contribute to enhanced summer school opportunities for low-income students.
- » Sponsor programs such as Boston's Thrive in 5 that involve the community in planning early educational opportunities that reflect the importance of all five dimensions of a child's growth: language development; cognition and general knowledge; approaches to learning; social and emotional development; and physical and motor development.

## **B** Elementary and Secondary Education

The Commission found that despite troubling outcomes for Latino students in WPS, Worcester is home to exceptional schools, district-wide programs, and cutting edge strategies that enhance academic achievement for Latino and other students. The following three examples of excellence are illustrative.

At the School level, University Park Campus School (UPCS), which encompasses grades 7–12, is a national model of a college preparatory school successfully serving mainly low-income and minority students. Some 45% of students at UPCS are Latino. For the last four years, on state-mandated English and Math graduation exams, UPCS has ranked first among urban schools serving low-income students and in the top quartile of all high schools in the state. All members of its first three graduating classes have gone on to college—every one of them a first-generation college attendee. Its strengths include a unique school culture where all students are expected to succeed, are supported by a rigorous academic program, mandatory summer academic camp, and the promise of free college tuition. Clark University is an essential partner in this effort. UPCS's outcomes far surpass the WPS average in terms of graduation rates, MCAS scores, and school engagement measures.

At the District level, Worcester should be commended for successfully expanding Advanced Placement (AP) courses, since they provide students with an early college-level experience,

academic rigor, and an opportunity to earn college credits while in high school. In particular, South High School is doing ground breaking work with Latino families and students to prepare and attract students to AP opportunities. The South High initiative is especially impressive because it prepares Latino families in the middle school years to understand the benefits of AP and to prime the pump for future enrollment of Latino students in AP. At present, only 5% of Latino students are enrolled in AP (WPS Data).

Similarly, working closely with the College Board, during the 2010-2011 academic year WPS offered, for the first time, a district-wide AP Art History course in collaboration with the Worcester Art Museum. This centralized meeting space, conducive to in-depth learning of the arts, brings together high school students from throughout the city. The success experienced with this model has spurred WPS to seek approval from the College Board to replicate this innovative and cost-effective model for three additional AP courses in 2013.

In addition, the district is home to three dual language programs, grades K-3, at the Norrback, Roosevelt, and Chandler Magnet elementary schools. Similar programs in other states and school districts have proven to be extremely effective at promoting bilingualism for all students, closing the achievement gap for English language learners, and creating a school culture where multiple languages and heritages are visibly affirmed and respected.

The Commission is concerned that, while there is compelling evidence for how to help traditionally under represented groups succeed academically in Worcester, far too few Latino and other students are given access to the best the schools have to offer. In part this is because successful programs are not scaled up (UPCS serves 241 of the 6,880 WPS high school students), are only partially operational (dual language is not implemented fully in Grades K-6), or are not accessed by all eligible students (only 5% of WPS Latino students participate in AP classes). Some of this is a matter of funding. Equality of access, however, is also a matter of academic culture, economics, and political influence, among other factors.

Let us accelerate the adoption of successful practices throughout the school district; there is too much at stake for incremental action. Think of the difference it makes in a young person's life to attend a school like UPCS where all students go on to be admitted to institutions of higher education as opposed to other high schools in Worcester where 32% of Latino 9th

grade students do not complete high school in 4 years. UPCS serves 241 of the 6,880 high school students in Worcester Public Schools. If it is true that success breeds success, then in Worcester this is happening at too slow a rate for the majority of our students.

Stakeholders looking to improve Latino achievement in elementary and secondary education can take the following actions:

### All Sectors Can

- » Support the five newly-designated innovation schools, which represent teacher-led efforts to transform schools through increased teacher autonomy coupled with innovative practices. Innovation schools have the potential to become a mechanism to scale up reforms that enhance achievement for a large number of students.
- » Support the large scale and transformative Promise Neighborhood Initiative, funded by the Federal Department of Education, which seeks to serve every child in Main South from cradle-to-college with the goal that all children will secure higher education opportunities and realize their career potential.

### Families Can

- » Research school options and choose those that provide the best fit for their children.
- » Communicate regularly with their children's teachers to monitor their educational progress.
- » Set guidelines for homework, monitor TV viewing and computer use, and establish curfews for bedtime.
- » Cultivate reading for pleasure at home as a daily practice.
- » Encourage their children to get involved in meaningful after school and summer programs at local churches, mosques, temples, or synagogues, at the Boys and Girls Club, the Worcester Youth Center, the Latino Education Institute, etc.
- » Recognize that MCAS is not certification of college-readiness and that they must encourage their children to take math, science and writing courses through their senior year of high school.

### Colleges and Universities Can

- » Expand ACCUPLACER® or similar testing in the high schools before the end of the junior year to provide a realistic assessment of college preparedness as an advising/teaching plan for each student.
- » Adopt an elementary or middle school as part of a structured program matching undergraduate mentors with WPS students in need of academic support.
- » Encourage undergraduate and graduate students, especially students of color and those with bilingual and bicultural competence, to pursue careers in education, with the goal of increasing the diversity of teacher candidates by 25% over four years. This is recognized by many area colleges and universities as a serious issue. For example, Worcester State University enrolls the largest number of students preparing to become teachers in the region. However, in the incoming class of 2011-2012, across the disciplines of Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Pre-Education, only six students of color were accepted. This is in stark contrast to the WPS student population, where students of color represent over 50% of all students.
- » Another collaborative option yet to be fully explored involves the creative use of work study money to allow undergraduates receiving financial aid to dedicate more time to off-campus commitments. The goal is 20 students from each of the 8 major institutions, resulting in cadre of 160 students, a critical mass able to make a difference. This would have the dual benefit of encouraging more college students to explore a career in education as well as provide daily examples of successful Latino students to the K-12 population, who too often attend schools with very few successful Latino role models. Since the Worcester college population is about 30,000 and many students have both the desire and the ability to help students struggling academically, this represents an under utilized resource for improving academic outcomes for all students.
- » Expand dual enrollment opportunities, in addition to AP courses, permitting the acquisition of college credit through a wider range of curricula, including career courses.
- » Expand scholarship opportunities for WPS students.
- » Offer more free tuition opportunities, such as those currently in place at Clark University for residents of Main

South neighborhood and at the College of the Holy Cross for Worcester residents whose families earn less than \$50,000 a year.

- » Create another UPC school with another college or university based on a grade 7-12 UPC model. Partner with an elementary school, one in each quadrant to offer mentoring and in-service training to staff.

### Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Expand collaboration with WPS to develop and implement parent involvement initiatives for the families of Latino students.
- » Train more families to successfully navigate the school system for the benefit of their children.
- » Provide more educational programming for students and their families.
- » Form alliances with WPS in their service area. For example, by participating in opening day activities at the schools, serving on site councils, etc.
- » Help to identify potential candidates to run for the Worcester School Committee and other local and state political offices.

### Schools Can

- » Adopt the MassCore for all students to assure every student has access to adequate college and career preparation. Monitor every student's progress toward high levels of academic achievement and college and career readiness.
- » Create a literacy plan for every student to ensure reading on grade level by the end of grade 3.
- » Improve the MCAS warning system for parents and students to include a plan of action for each student to pass the exam.
- » Create an action plan, in collaboration with parents, for students performing poorly on language assessment tests such as the DIBELS and DRA.
- » Build on the dual language programs currently in place at three Worcester elementary schools, with a view to fully implementing a dual language enrollment program spanning grades K-6, modeled on best practices in the field.

### Schools Can Have:

- » Friendly signs inside and out welcoming families and visitors in their native language and explaining how to get around the building.
- » Standards of welcoming behavior that apply to all staff, including bus drivers, security guards, custodians, and cafeteria workers.
- » Friendly front office staff members who recognize visitors right away, provide information easily, and answer the phone in a way that makes people glad they have called.
- » A comfortable family resource room stocked with books, games, and educational information that families can borrow and where parents can meet.

### Government Can

- » Expand dual language opportunities to make them available as an option for all elementary students in Worcester.
- » Expand summer school programs for primary and secondary school students. Research studies show that students who are at academic risk lose the gains of the school year over the summer. This is especially true in the primary grades where they have just begun to acquire literacy skills, which are lost if not consistently used. Summer programs are thus necessary to ensure that the academic skills slide does not happen. When designed in collaboration with churches, social agencies, and other community-based organizations, these programs could also serve to provide added enrichment activities that would accelerate student achievement during the school year.
- » Provide incentive grants to public colleges that develop plans for seamless transitional supports from high school to college with an emphasis on under served student populations.
- » Involve inter-faith groups, and social agencies in summer literacy programs.

### Private Sector Can

- » Increase college scholarships for under served youth in Worcester.
- » Create more partnerships like that of AVID/Hanover.
- » Identify a particular school to “adopt” as a partner for volunteer initiatives.

## C Out-of-School Youth

We are deeply concerned about what is happening to out-of-school youth. The Commission found that there is no organization that “owns” dropouts as a group; thus prevention programs, recovery practices, and other initiatives are not woven into an effective system. This is especially a problem for Latino students, only 67% of whom graduated from high school in four years in 2011. If the current pattern holds, of the 2505 Latino students enrolled in high school in 2011, 1678 will graduate from high school in four years and 827 will not. Stakeholders looking to support the academic achievement of out-of-school youth can take the following actions:

### Families Can

- » Encourage their children to enroll in one of the WPS alternative programs offering night school and work-based learning opportunities.
- » Encourage out-of-school family members to enroll in General Education Diploma (GED) or Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses.

### Colleges and Universities Can

- » Allow GED students to enroll in dual-credit programs, and provide funding for them.
- » Integrate remedial education competencies into credit-earning courses, especially vocational/career/technical courses.
- » Create academic credit recovery programs for high school students in the same institutions where they can receive associate’s degrees.

### Community-Based Organizations Can

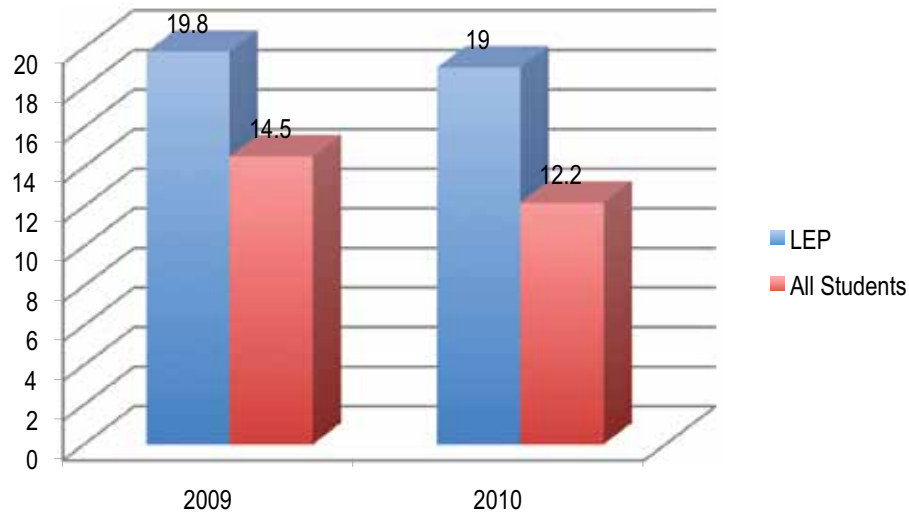
- » Work together with WPS to respond at an individual level to help students most at risk of leaving school.
- » Offer GED and ABE courses.
- » Expand employment and training programs.
- » Link youth with employment opportunities.
- » Serve as advocates for out-of-school youth in public policy discussions.
- » Sponsor additional summer school learning opportunities.

### Schools Can

- » Create more drop-out prevention programs.
- » Make more of an effort to engage with the families of at-risk youth in collaboration with community-based organizations.
- » Increase the number of quality alternative education and training options for struggling students and dropouts.
- » Review attendance policies that may have unintended negative impacts on the continuing high school enrollment of teen parents.
- » Reach out to the families of students who have dropped out of school to encourage them to return.



Table 8. Annual Drop-out Rate, WPS, LEP vs All Students, 2009 and 2010



### Government Can

- » Work to raise the legal age to drop out of school to 18.
- » Increase coordination among schools, alternative programs, and city agencies to close gaps in the second chance system.
- » Convene a multi-agency alternative education planning group.
- » Provide additional funding for alternative education programs.
- » Expand funding for adult GED and ESL (English as a Second Language)/ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs.
- » Expand GED and pre-GED courses in Spanish, enabling those who successfully complete them to enroll in college ESL/ESOL courses covered by federal financial aid.

### Private Sector Can

- » Foster career-specific mentoring programs at schools, businesses, and civic organizations in the community to reinforce the value of high-quality education.

- » Replicate programs like Classroom at the Workplace, organized by the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, which combines academic remediation and work experience for students who have yet to pass the Math or English portions of the MCAS. Employers provide 90 minutes a day of classes at the workplace. Since 2003, over 70% of participants have passed both portions of the MCAS and 92% have passed at least one pre-test.

## D English Language Learners

The gap in opportunity between limited English proficient (LEP) and English proficient (EP) students is especially large in Massachusetts. While 81% of all students graduate from high school in the state, the percentage among English language learners (ELLs) is only 53% (*Halting the Race to the Bottom*).

In 2010, *Halting the Race to the Bottom: Urgent Interventions for the Improvement of the Education of English Language Learners in Massachusetts and Selected Districts* was released as the final report of the English Language Learners Sub-Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Committee on the Proficiency Gap.

The Worcester data from this report indicate that LEP students, a growing share of the student population in this district, are not offered sufficient opportunities to develop their English language skills. They are even more limited in their opportunities to engage with rigorous academic material and to develop plans to attend college. The result is a high proportion of dropouts among LEP students (see table 8).

What is especially troubling in the Worcester data is that the English language learners dropping out of school are disproportionately those testing the *highest* in terms of proficiency in English, and who therefore end up mainstreamed into the regular classroom without adequate academic supports. We are losing the very students that should be best able to graduate high school, if they are provided with appropriate instruction and assistance.

The enrollment of LEP students in Worcester has increased dramatically in the past decade, rising from 3,379 (13.5%) in 2004 to 5,621 (24.3%) in 2009 and 26% in 2011. This increase in LEP enrollments in WPS is occurring during a period of declining enrollments overall—a 10.5% decline between 2001 and 2009. (The decline among EP students is 27%.) As a result, Latino students, and among them students of limited English proficiency, are the fastest growing groups in Worcester Public Schools.

In this context, improving outcomes for English language learners is essential if WPS is to make additional progress towards the goals mandated by No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and other federal programs. Since 2009, WPS has taken significant steps to improve the education of LEP students. The Commission applauds ongoing efforts to certify more teachers in ELL pedagogy, expand dual language immersion programs, and include ELLs in all educational programming offered by WPS. The aggregate MCAS pass and proficiency rates, however, still show that EP students far outperform their LEP counterparts, with the widest gaps appearing in high school. The pass and proficiency rates for ELLs in Worcester, moreover, are lower than the state-wide average.

In 2009, most ELLs in Worcester were enrolled at the elementary grade level (74.2%), while about 9% were middle school students and 17% were in high school (*Halting the Race to the Bottom*). In other words, the current age distribution of this population presents the city with a unique opportunity to build strong dual language programs that will maximize the

transferring of skills between languages and prepare students academically for middle and high school.

English language learners face multiple challenges as they work towards perfecting their oral and written proficiency in English, mastering subject-specific material at grade level, graduating from high school, and succeeding in college. Each of these phases is affected by a range of variables, some within the control of schools, others in the domains of family and community. The recommendations below touch on all sectors able to assist these students to realize their full academic potential:

### Families Can

- » Read to their children in Spanish, which will improve their literacy skills in Spanish as well as in other languages, including English.
- » Personally demonstrate to their children the importance of learning English by enrolling in one of the many adult ESL/ESOL courses currently offered in Worcester.
- » Request that the school system provide ESL/ESOL classes for parents at a variety of times and venues so that they are accessible to working parents and families with limited transportation.
- » Enroll in a GED in Spanish or a pre-GED in Spanish program to work towards obtaining the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- » Pursue higher education options, thereby modeling for their children the importance of education as a life-long process.
- » Work with the schools to become active partners in the education of their children.
- » Request that the teachers educating their children be qualified in accordance with the state's ELL teacher certification process.
- » Request that all Title III services such as after school and summer programs be made available to their children.
- » Actively participate in school activities to make sure their voices are heard.

## Colleges and Universities Can

- » Develop educational programming based on the needs of WPS. It is essential that the large numbers of ELL students be taken into consideration when designing curricula for teacher education courses. Presently, too few newly graduated teachers are prepared to address the needs of English language learners and the achievement gap affecting Latino students in the district.
- » Capitalize on the transferability of skills from one language to another. For instance, research shows that critical thinking skills, competency in reading, writing and mathematical literacy are all transferable from one language to another (August & Garcia, 1988; Hakuta, 1995; Bialystok, 2001).
- » Make certain that teacher preparation curricula adequately prepare students to work in urban education environments by including a core class on teaching English language learners for all education majors by 2013, and creating additional civic engagement learning opportunities for students in after school programs serving minority students.
- » Explore online partnerships with universities in Spanish-speaking countries, accepting core credits of Spanish-instructed general education, math and science courses through transfer arrangements toward local college degrees.

## Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Work in partnership with the district to develop initiatives to benefit parents and students, such as ESL/ESOL classes and parent orientations to help families become more engaged in the education of their children.
- » Review and make adjustments as necessary when developing initiatives to support families. It is important to evaluate traditional partnerships to ensure interventions and programs are relevant and effective for the families of ELLs.

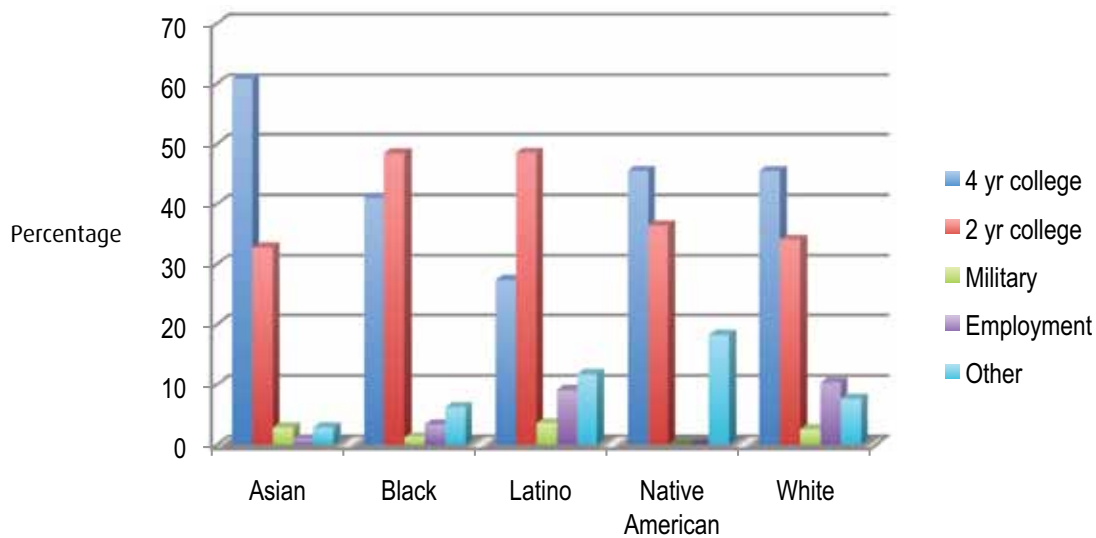
## Schools Can

- » Provide high quality services for all ELLs in the district.
- » Allocate more resources to programs proven to be effective in diminishing the achievement gap for ELLs.
- » Review the policy for assessing ELL and SPED students. Recent research reports that in Boston ELLs are significantly more likely to be misdiagnosed with learning disabilities as opposed to being offered an appropriate track for ELL. The Commission is concerned about the high number of English language learners who are diagnosed with learning disabilities across the state.
- » Continue and expand upon professional development workshops so that all teachers are qualified to educate ELLs.
- » Hire teachers and other staff who understand the experiences of English language learners and who can serve as role models for them.
- » Reach out to families so that they can become more proactive in the education of their children.
- » Use evidence-based program planning based on accurate and relevant data that includes a thorough analysis of the situation of Latino students in general and ELLs in particular.

## Government Can

- » Provide educational programs and professional development to increase knowledge about this population among the employees of government agencies.
- » Provide educational programming to introduce available programs and services to ELLs and Latino families.
- » Ensure that all government agencies have action plans that correlate to the needs of ELLs, in particular those who come to WPS as adolescents or illiterate in their first language.
- » Examine the screening process and related services provided to ELLs in Worcester in light of a recent Department of Justice finding in Boston that English language learners are not properly assessed or provided adequate educational supports. For example, request an assessment of the number of ELLs, the number of teachers assigned to serve these students who are alternative or not teacher certified,

Table 9. Student Post-Secondary Plans by Race, WPS



For data supporting this graph see [www.worcester.edu/LEI](http://www.worcester.edu/LEI) under Mayor’s Commission.

the number of teachers who are bilingual or ELL certified, and the completion date of the subsequent assessment for each of the above identified students.

- » Prioritize efforts to review best practices in Worcester for English language learners, drawing on insights from the field of ELL pedagogy to improve services for this critical population of students.
- » Prioritize access to full day pre-school program for English language learners and other potentially at-risk children. Studies have shown that “ELL children benefitted more from full-day kindergarten than did English speaking children” (Hall-Kenyon et. al., 2009) and that “disadvantaged full-day kindergartners gained literacy skills at a relatively faster rate than their more affluent half-day kindergarten peers” (Zvoch, 2009).
- » Develop a plan to address “summer fall-back” among disadvantaged students, who are especially prone to losing academic ground over the summer months (Zvoch, 2009).
- » Maintain flexible funding to more efficiently allocate resources among ESL/ESOL, pre-GED in Spanish, and GED in Spanish programs in response to community needs.

## E College and Career Success

The Commission is concerned that too few Latino students who enter college earn a degree. Moreover, of those who aspire to college, relatively few Latinos plan to attend a four-year college (see table 9).

The typical higher education access pattern for Latinos is that some 50% begin at a nearby community college, but do not transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution, despite the fact that up to two years of college credit can be transferred. Usually, they attend part-time while working, commute to college, are first generation college students, are low-income, and have less academic preparation than their peers (*Creating the Will*, 2000).

Community colleges, in addition to serving as baccalaureate transfer programs, offer a wide range of career preparation programs at the certificate and associate degree level. Programs such as nursing and technical training are in particular demand and must be expanded, particularly since the “no strikes” policy limits access to Worcester Technical High School.

Stakeholders looking to increase the numbers of Latino youth completing higher education and embarking on successful careers can take the following actions:

## Families Can

- » Assist youth in identifying potential part-time or summer work and volunteer opportunities.
- » Encourage youth to apply to college through visits to local campuses and repeated discussion regarding the expectation of college attendance.
- » Attend career fairs and college fairs.
- » Attend college financial aid information sessions.

## Colleges and Universities Can

- » Offer ESL enrollment information sessions.
- » Invite WPS students to visit campus in order to familiarize themselves with college life and expectations.
- » Improve transitions between two- and four-year institutions of higher education to facilitate the education of Latino students enrolled at community colleges.
- » Foster a diverse campus climate that promotes educational equity and success for all students.
- » Analyze the factors causing Latino students to drop out of college in disproportionate numbers and develop institution-specific solutions to address the problem.
- » Build on programs of demonstrated effectiveness in raising college completion rates among traditionally underrepresented students, such as the Berkeley Emerging Scholars Program, which focuses on collaborative learning (Asera, 2001) and high-quality civic engagement learning programs, which have been shown to dramatically increase academic success among all college students (Cress et. al., 2010).
- » Offer financial aid and other admissions information in Spanish.
- » Pilot a program with the Worcester Public Schools at one high school and have an orientation program for perspective 9th graders.

## Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Introduce the idea of college education early on and reinforce it in all their programs serving Latino youth throughout childhood.
- » Organize after school field trips to local colleges and universities.
- » Become informed about admissions and financial aid requirements and procedures at area colleges.
- » Visit local campuses regularly and build on collaborative relationships with administration, faculty, and staff.

## Schools Can

- » Begin in elementary school to talk to students about college and familiarize them with the opportunities offered by higher education.
- » Provide information to parents of middle school students about the importance of college and how to prepare for higher education, including the need for students to take the right courses and to perform well academically.
- » Organize bilingual seminars for parents on financing college and the application process.
- » Institute a policy requiring that all students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) while in high school, as is done in Chicago.
- » Increase work-based learning opportunities—both paid and unpaid—for youth.
- » Actively involve employers/business leaders (especially Latino employers/business leaders) in school programming as guest speakers.
- » Establish field trips to businesses and job shadowing activities.
- » Create work-readiness courses for students.
- » Develop/increase the use of teacher “externships” with area businesses within the fields they teach, to help ensure a connection between their course materials and the world of work.

## Government Can

- » Work to increase the level of financial aid to help students access and attain higher education.
- » Encourage communities, school districts, and institutions of higher education to develop strong, collaborative K-16 educational strategies to improve Latino achievement throughout the educational pipeline.
- » Support legislation along the lines of the DREAM Act to provide equal access to education for all Massachusetts high school graduates, including those brought to the United States as minors without documented immigration status.
- » Increase funding for school-to-career connecting activities programs that support the development of student internship and work-based learning opportunities.
- » Expand connections with the local Workforce Investment Board to help align the initiatives of employer stakeholders with youth work readiness efforts.
- » Investigate the value of mandating that all students take and pass a work-readiness course and/or have work experience in order to graduate.
- » Increase access to and available spaces at Worcester Technical High School.

## Private Sector Can

- » Establish volunteer programs that encourage scientists, technology professionals, engineers, mathematicians and other STEM professionals to participate in homework help and tutoring programs.
- » Become active partners with Worcester schools to help develop youth college/career readiness, by serving as guest speakers in classrooms, hosting student job shadows and interns, giving workplace tours to student groups, and hosting teacher “externship” placements.
- » Explore ways to hire more youth employees and volunteers, to give them real world career experience.

# Profiles in Success

## Fast ForWord

This year, Chandler Magnet was among five elementary schools in Worcester piloting the Fast ForWord program—a series of computer-delivered brain fitness exercises designed to improve reading, language, and cognitive skills. The exercises are adaptive, so students are challenged according to their needs.

This reading intervention product supports existing school curricula. When students learn to process information more efficiently, it makes the classroom instruction they receive more effective. Students in the Worcester Public Schools have shown an average gain of 1.5 years in reading skills within the first 54 days of implementation. This is consistent with schools throughout the country that have employed this strategy.

Chandler Magnet School is the only program in the city that targets ELL students. Students in grades 1-6, who work in the lab every day for 30 minutes and are also offered additional time in the lab before and after school, have shown significant score increases across multiple standardized tests. Indeed, parents of English proficient students are requesting the program be offered to all students.

The Fast ForWord program, based on over 30 years of neuroscience research, is school tested, and districted approved across the U.S. (and in over 40 other countries).

## AVID/Hanover Partnership

Worcester is fortunate to have a business community actively engaged in working to improve education for all students.

The Hanover Insurance Company for example, has funded the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program for the last decade, investing heavily in professional development, offering scholarship incentives, funding AVID libraries for all middle and high schools, establishing a self-sustaining tutoring program in partnership with local colleges, and supplying employee volunteers who serve as mentors and role models.

AVID targets students in the academic “middle” who have the desire to go to college but may lack the organizational skills and the support that helps turn academic potential into achievement and success. Hanover is committed to continuing their support for the foreseeable future and will have contributed more than \$500,000 by the end of 2012.



## Goal 3:

Increase academic rigor to facilitate access to higher education and 21st century career opportunities

### **A** Introduction

Since the establishment of the common school movement in Massachusetts in the mid-19th century, with its emphasis on providing students with critical-thinking skills, information, and current career skills, public schools have provided countless residents with the tools for meaningful work and economic uplift, thereby enhancing their own lives and the quality of community life. In addition to the cultivation of individual gifts and talents, the passing on of skills and knowledge to students, and the cultivation of the habits that will allow individuals to exercise their responsibilities as members of a community, U.S. schools have also served as important institutions for the development and expansion of a healthy, vibrant working and middle class.

In short, 82% of Latino students enrolled in our city's schools are not preparing academically for the demands of 21st century colleges and careers contingent on post-secondary school education.



Worcester, along with the rest of the Commonwealth and indeed the nation is in the midst of economic and demographic changes, the magnitude and long-term implications of which have not been experienced since we shifted from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy. The skill and knowledge bases that are increasingly expected for success in 21st century careers and in higher education have converged in large measure: high level literacy, numeracy, and communication skills as well as analytic ability and the ability to think critically and work cooperatively. For students to compete effectively in this environment, our schools must provide the demanding coursework and challenging experiences that will develop these abilities.

A close look at the statistics for Worcester indicate that we have much work to do to prepare our young people for the demands of this century and an increasingly competitive and global economy. Our graduation requirements have not kept pace with the admission requirements of many colleges and often do not provide students with the skills and habits required for 21st century career and college expectations. In our schools, students follow the sequences and coursework of several levels of courses: Advanced Placement, Honors, College Preparatory, and Other. The current “College Preparatory” track is not aligned with MassCore and falls short of the requirements for many public and private colleges and universities. Currently, only 38% of WPS students are enrolled in honors courses—those with the increased level of rigor that consistently offers students access to challenging curricula. For Latino students, that number is dramatically lower, only 18 percent. In short, 82% of Latino students enrolled in our city’s schools are not preparing academically for the demands of 21st century colleges and careers contingent on post-secondary school education.

While the low numbers for Latino students on track for college and professional success are shocking, the aggregate numbers for all students in the District also give pause. Sixty-two percent of WPS students are not accessing the demanding material that will provide them the skills and habits of mind to allow them, upon graduation, to succeed in college or in the workforce. The breadth of this issue both within and beyond the Latino community brings into question current structures and practices that result in low college readiness for the overall population of students and minimal readiness for Latino students. To address these issues will require thoughtful action on the part of the various sectors of our community.

## **B** Recommendations

Stakeholders looking to increase academic rigor can take the following actions:

### Families Can

- » Work with teachers, guidance staff, and community-based organizations to assure that students are taking, in each subject, the most demanding curriculum that they are able to master.
- » Work with teachers, guidance staff, and community-based organizations to develop a long term academic plan that develops student mastery in the core academic courses of mathematics (including algebra I and II, geometry, and one other course); three years of science (including one with laboratory); four years of English, four years of history, and two years of study of a foreign language.
- » Consider dual enrollment programs that offer students college coursework while in high school and allow students to accrue college credit while in secondary school.
- » Create a culture of high academic expectation, pride in achievement, and strong learning habits.
- » Consistently monitor student progress.
- » Create a rich learning environment with access to books and other cultural resources.
- » Make it a habit of visiting the Worcester Public Library and encourage daily summer reading at home.

## Colleges and Universities Can

- » Develop and expand outreach programs to inform students and families, beginning in middle school, of the concept of college preparation and college readiness as well as the coursework and other requirements for college admission.
- » In developing partnerships with middle and secondary schools, include specific strategies to improve college access for and recruitment of Latino students.
- » Accelerate student learning with dual enrollment programs for high school students.

## Community-Based Organizations Can

- » Beginning at the transition to middle school, work with students and families to develop a long-term plan for academic success.
- » Provide opportunities for the meaningful use of out-of-school time for academic support and educational and cultural enrichment.
- » Provide opportunities to prevent summer learning loss of knowledge and academic skills.
- » Provide programs to inform parents and students at all grade levels of the coursework and community resources that support college and career readiness.
- » Provide students with an academic planner that allows students to self-monitor their coursework along with their skills and level of academic mastery.
- » Align resources to ensure early college and career opportunities for every student.
- » Create partnerships that expand learning for students beyond the traditional school day and deliver cradle-to-career systems of support for every student.
- » Provide information at critical junctures about the college admissions and financial aid process, including college course and testing requirements, and provide support to families applying for financial aid.
- » Help families to interpret LEXILE scores and improve their children's reading skills.

## Schools Can

- » Institute a mandatory summer school program for students not at grade level in the primary grades.
- » Review and eliminate policies that restrict students from accessing challenging coursework.
- » Work with students and families to develop long-term academic plans with the goal of each student graduating with a sound set of academic and career skills.
- » Create a culture of high academic expectations for all students.
- » Regularly provide easily interpreted and actionable information to parents, students, and families about students' strengths and weaknesses.
- » Involve families in a meaningful way in academic planning for their children.
- » Work to redesign courses and teaching strategies to maximize the access of all students to demanding material.
- » Provide information at critical junctures about the college admissions and financial aid process, including college course and testing requirements, and provide support to families applying for financial aid.
- » Create more literacy opportunities during the summer months

## Government Can

- » Eliminate policies and practices that inhibit students from accessing demanding career and college preparatory coursework.
- » Support WPS efforts to re-tool schools with respect to pedagogical practices and instructional materials, as well as infrastructure that support high level learning and skill development.
- » Support teachers and other educators in the lifelong development of professional practice so that professionals remain current in the knowledge, skills, and instructional methods key to teaching and learning in the 21st century.
- » Add summer opportunities for local youth to improve their work- and college-readiness.

## Private Sector Can

- » Align and coordinate efforts with schools and others with a vested interest in education, to assure the broadest and deepest access to challenging academic material.
- » Support efforts to update and re-tool school and classroom infrastructure.
- » Support efforts to educate and inform parents about long-term academic planning.
- » Advocate for programs, policies, and practices that provide the broadest access to challenging material for students.
- » Provide opportunities for the application of learning through internships that align with 21st Century standards.
- » Support the Worcester Compact.

<b>Worcester Compact</b>
Delivering on High Expectations and Outstanding Results for All Students
100% of students are guaranteed a rigorous core curriculum resulting in measurable gains in student learning
By 2012
80% of students proficient in Reading by Grade 3
80% of students proficient in Math by Grade 3
80% of students proficient in ELA by Grade 8
80% of students proficient in Math by Grade 8
For the Class of 2013
100% of graduates will successfully complete high School coursework that prepares them for both college and career

## Profiles in Success

### Community Scholarship Initiatives

#### Worcester's Latino Dollars for Scholars

Worcester's Latino Dollars for Scholars was established in 1995 by Latino educators and community leaders to increase access to higher education, and to prepare young people for a satisfying and rewarding life. This all-volunteer organization has raised over \$250,000 and awarded over 400 scholarships to area students, thus exemplifying the value the Latino community value puts on of forging a better world for youngsters through increased educational opportunities.

#### Hispanics Achieving and Celebrating Excellence (H.A.C.E)


Hispanics Achieving and Celebrating Excellence (H.A.C.E) was created in 1985 by faculty and staff at Quinsigamond Community College, and business and community leaders in Worcester, to encourage youth to focus on education, to recognize the achievements of young people of Latino heritage, and to provide positive role models. For 26 years H.A.C.E has recognized Latino youth for accomplishments in the areas of academics, arts, athletics, leadership, and community service.

#### North High/Quinsigamond Community College Partnership

QCC and North High School have partnered to provide a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Early College program. The purpose of this Race to the Top grant program is to support the planning and implementation of an Early College High School focused on STEM disciplines at North High linking secondary education with postsecondary educational opportunities for underrepresented students, resulting in higher college attendance rates. These efforts will help to provide STEM-focused dual enrollment and acceleration opportunities directed to first generation college attending students.



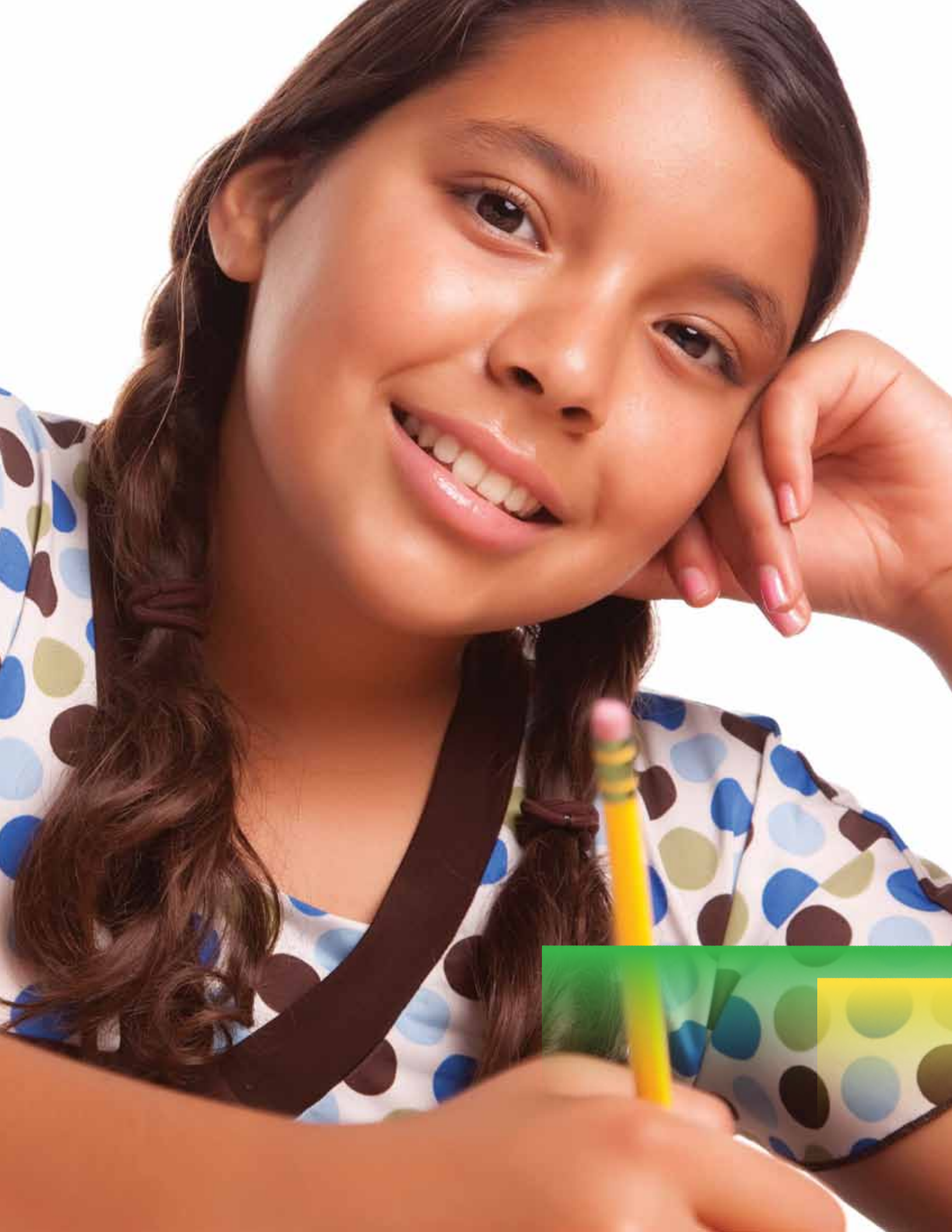
# Conclusion



The goal of the Mayor’s Commission on Latino Educational Excellence was to bring together individuals and organizations from across the city of Worcester to address the pressing academic needs of Latino youth. While the recommendations included in this report address the particular needs of Latino youth, they are more far-reaching, and have the potential to improve outcomes for all Worcester students.

As noted throughout the report, improving the educational achievement of Latino students in Worcester is a significant undertaking that requires contributions from every segment of our community. While schools, community-based organizations, public/private partnerships, and individual families have experienced pockets of success, we call for increased collaboration among these entities to leverage their knowledge, skills, and experience to achieve our over arching goal—academic success for all youth. It is our hope that this document will serve as a roadmap for collaboration among all stakeholders with a view to catalyzing the process of scaling up educational reform.

The future of our city  
depends on it.



## **A** Accountability

The completion of this report is the Commission's first step in addressing the achievement and opportunity gap for Latino students in Worcester. In order to continue advancing this important work we commit to:

- » Solicit feedback and cooperation on the report's recommendations from key stake holders including Worcester Public Schools, the higher education community, the private sector, and government, at all levels, in order to develop and monitor a long-term action plan.
- » Reconvene next year to review a progress report developed by a sub-committee of the Commission.
- » Stay connected as a body through quarterly updates on the status of the various recommendations.

## **B** Acknowledgements

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## Profiles in Success

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### Nativity School/Holy Cross Partnership

Founded in 2003, the Nativity School of Worcester was conceived as a partnership between the College of the Holy Cross and the community, to address the challenge of improving graduation rates for low-income boys. Nativity is an accredited, independent, Jesuit middle school that provides a quality, all-scholarship education to under served boys of all faiths.

The Nativity model of education began with the creation of the Nativity Mission Center in New York City in 1971. The model relies on: small class sizes, generally no more than 15 students; an extended school year, replete with a mandatory summer program; an extended school day, including an evening study period; and a graduate support program.

The Nativity School of Worcester is committed to the success of its students not only in middle school, but—with guidance, tutoring, and financial support—in high school as well. The results to date have been impressive: 100% of Nativity's 62 graduates were accepted into and received adequate financial aid to attend private high school; 94% of Nativity graduates are on track to graduate in four years time, as compared to 64% of their city peers; over 90% of the two-year graduates of the Nativity Fellowship program for young teachers continue to work in education and a remarkable 70% of them work in urban education.

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