



Research Brief

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Revisiting Latina/o Transfer Culture: Recent Trends and Implications for California

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Introduction to Building a Latinx Transfer Culture (BLTC)

Community college continues to be a central entry point for underrepresented and disadvantaged students into postsecondary education (Velasco, et al., 2024). For instance, Latinx¹ students may begin their postsecondary education at a community college because they are placed in a non-college track throughout their K-12 education career (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017), are uninformed about the college process due to the limited guidance they receive from school personnel (Vega, 2018), they cannot afford university tuition, and/or do not have the English language skills necessary to succeed at a four-year institution (Castro & Cortez, 2017). For first-time college-going, Latinx college students, the community college serves as an important pipeline into higher education. Over 60% of first-time college-going Latinx students in the U.S. enrolled at a community college during the Spring of 2022 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). Further, Latinx students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college report aspiring to earn a bachelor's degree via transfer and recognize the community college as their only choice in this process (Salas et al., 2018). This brief highlights the importance of the community colleges as an entry point for Latinx students into higher education and advances strategies to increase Latinx community college students' transfer into four-year institutions. The brief emphasizes the need for culturally responsive interventions, stronger educational partnerships across all educational sectors, and institutional support systems to address barriers and challenges to ensure academic and social success for Latinx students in the community college and beyond.

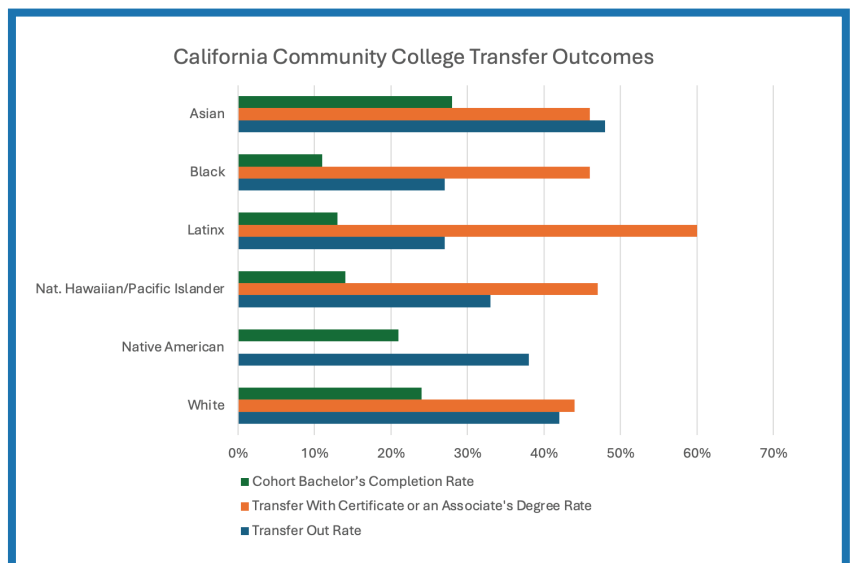
According to Pérez and Ceja (2010), to build a Latina/o transfer culture and increase the number of Latina/o students who transfer to four-year colleges and universities and obtain their bachelor's degrees, several institutional structures, policies, and partnerships need to be set in place. For instance, four-year institutions must implement institutional interventions that are culturally responsive and address the specific needs of the diverse Latinx student populations they serve. Simultaneously, educational partnerships between middle school and high school, as well as between high school and higher education institutions, need to be strengthened to better prepare Latinx students early for college (Pérez & Ceja, 2010). The next section provides an overview of Latinx community college enrollment patterns and outcomes. We focus our brief on California due to the state's significant Latinx population, the role of community colleges as a primary entry point to higher education for Latinx students, and the need to address equity gaps and

ensure success for this growing demographic.

Overview/Literature Review

Research shows that dual enrollment can have a positive impact on the college-going culture for Latinx students since enrolling in dual enrollment courses academically prepares them to go to college (Martinez et al., 2019), increases students' confidence that they would succeed in college (Lopez & Droogsma, 2024), and increases college attendance rates (Lee et al., 2022). Further, studies documenting the impact of the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) in California reveal a higher transfer rate for students who attain

an ADT. A recent report from the Public Policy Institute of California showed that 50% of students with an ADT transferred within 4 years, compared to 38% of students with an AA/AS degree (Johnson & Cuellar-Mejia, 2020). Out of community college graduates, Latinx students earn the ADT at higher rates compared to any other demographic group (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2020). Among Latinx students enrolled in community colleges within the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), 58% who earned associate degrees in 2019-2020 obtained their ADT (Reddy et al., 2022). Despite Latinx earning ADTs, Baker et al. (2023)



show there is no strong evidence that the ADT reduces the White-Latinx and Asian-Latinx gaps in BA/BS attainment.

Unfortunately, Latinx students still face many barriers to transfer. At the community college, these barriers include part-time enrollment, financial challenges, academic obstacles due to academic under preparation, and lack of access to transfer information (Acevedo-Gil, 2018). At the receiving institution, Latinx students face academic and social challenges. Academically, they confront challenges due to adapting to the quarter system from a semester system (Solis & Durán, 2020). Socially, they experience isolation due to their ethno/racial identity, age, socio-economic standing, and perceived ability (Castro & Cortez, 2017). For Latinx students, these challenges are compounded due to the receiving institution not having the academic, financial, and social support in place to meet their specific needs (Del Real Viramontes, 2020).

Overview of Community College Enrollment Patterns and Outcomes

Examining the community college transfer outcomes in California, data shows that 27% of First-Time In College (FTIC) Latinx students who start at the community college transfer to a four-year institution within six years of entering the community college. Sixty percent of FTIC Latinxs¹ who transferred within six years completed a certificate or an associate degree before enrolling at a four-year institution. Furthermore, 13% of FTIC Latinxs who started at a community college transferred to a four-year institution and earned a bachelor's degree within six years of their community college entry (Velasco, et al., 2024). Figure 1 highlights the community college transfer outcomes by major racial/ethnic groups in California.

Dual enrollment² can positively impact the educational attainment of FTIC degree-seeking Latinx students who use the community college to complete their bachelor's degree. Recent data shows

that 52% of FTIC degree-seeking Latinx with prior dual enrollment transfer with completing a certificate or an associate's degree compared to 43% without prior dual enrollment. Further, 30% of FTIC degree-seeking Latinx students with prior enrollment earn their bachelor's degree from a four-year institution within six years of their community college entry, compared to 13% without prior dual enrollment (Velasco, et al., 2024).

Looking at post-transfer outcomes, data shows the potential of completing a certificate or an associate degree and transferring to a public four-year institution on the educational achievement of FTIC Latinx students. For instance, 57.6% of students who transfer to a public four-year institution complete a certificate or an associate degree, compared to 25.1% who transfer to a private institution. Additionally, 81.5% of students who complete their bachelor's degree at a public institution within four years complete a certificate or an associate degree before transferring, compared to 66.5% who complete their

bachelor's degree at a private institution (Velasco, et al., 2024).

Implications

To maximize the number of Latinxs earning their bachelor's degree from a four-year institution in California, higher education institutions should develop transfer policies and practices specific to the needs of Latinx students. These may include to: 1) increase the participation of Latinx students in **dual enrollment programs**. 2) strengthen the **Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)** pathway to align with students' transfer aspirations to the California State University system, University of California system, or private institutions; and/or 3) ensure that the receiving institution develops and practices a **transfer receptive culture** (Jain et al., 2011; Del Real Viramontes, 2020), which requires colleges/universities to engage and support Latinx students from enrolling at their community college to completing their baccalaureate degree. Focusing on implementing these three recommendations will improve pathways and

support systems for Latinx students to successfully transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and complete their bachelor's degrees.

Notes

¹We use the term Latina/o because, at the time of when (Pérez and Ceja, 2010) was published, this was commonly used to identify students who racially, ethnically, and/or culturally identified as Latina/o. We use the current term Latinx to be more inclusive of students intersecting identities.

²Dual Enrollment enables high school students to take college courses while still in high school through a community college.

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