

# Benchmarking Latino College Completion to meet National Goals: 2010 to 2020

**“We will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”**

**-President Barack Obama, February 24, 2009**

## **Benchmarking a national college completion goal**

In 2009, President Obama set an ambitious goal for the U.S. to become the top ranked country in the world in college degree attainment by 2020.<sup>1</sup> Currently, Canada is the world leader in educational attainment. If one makes a conservative assumption that the next cohort of young adults in Canada will be at least as educated as the current cohort, the college attainment rate of 25 to 64 year-olds in Canada will be 50.8 percent by the year 2020.

In the U.S., currently 39 percent of all adults ages 25 to 64 have earned an associate degree or higher. It is reasonable to estimate that the U.S. will gain some ground in degree attainment by 2020 if one accounts for: 1) the population growth; 2) the number of 25 to 52 year-olds with a college degree; 3) the net migration of degree-holders experienced in the U.S.; and, 4) the accumulation of degrees produced at the current completion rate through to 2020. It is estimated these factors would result in a college attainment rate of 44 percent for the U.S. by 2020— leaving a gap of nearly 7 percent with Canada.

In 2008, the U.S. produced 2.3 million associate’s and bachelor’s degrees. To reach 51 percent college degree attainment and become the world leader, the U.S. will need to produce an additional 13.3 million degrees by 2020.

## **Why focus on Latinos?**

While all groups will have to increase college degree attainment to meet President Obama’s college completion goals, increasing Latino educational attainment is crucial because their educational attainment is lower than other groups (only 19 percent of Latino adults have earned an associate or higher) and the Latino population is rapidly expanding. By 2020, Latinos are projected to represent about 20 percent of the 18-64 year-old U.S. population, compared to 15 percent in 2008. The young Latino population is projected to grow even more rapidly; by 2020 Latinos are projected to represent close to 25 percent of the U.S. 18-29 year-old population, up from 18 percent in 2008. In addition, economically competitive jobs in the U.S. will require education beyond a high school degree. Since Latinos will make up a greater percent of the U.S. population by 2020, increasing Latino college completion is critical for the U.S. to meet its future societal and workforce needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, the Obama Administration revised its national degree completion goal to only compare the completion of the population 25-34 years of age in the international rankings.

## About this benchmarking guide

This benchmarking guide is not a substitute for more detailed and common metrics developed by other leading national organizations, such as the National Governor's Association, Complete College America, and the College Board. The common set of metrics these organizations have shared are important in guiding both statewide and national efforts to increase college completion.

This benchmarking guide provides a clear framework and public baseline for tracking our nation's college degree completion goal disaggregated by race/ethnicity, and focused on Latino students. This guide includes some of the aforementioned common metrics, and also provides additional ways to consider the progress of college completion. Our framework includes two sets of metrics using existing data: 1) projections of degree completion needs, and 2) analysis of current equity gaps in degree completion. The guide also includes contextual information about Latinos in the educational pipeline and the equity gap between Latinos and whites in achievement by state.

The analysis in this benchmarking guide assumes racial/ethnic gaps in degree attainment must be eliminated to meet the 2020 goal. If the current racial/ethnic gaps remain, whites and Asians would need to nearly double their college attainment rates by 2020 in order to meet the Obama Administration's attainment goal. Given the current attainment levels of both whites and Asians compared to other groups, it is highly improbable that they alone can increase attainment sufficiently to meet the national goal. These data strongly suggest that the gap between the U.S. and leading countries cannot be closed without closing the racial/ethnic gaps in degree attainment.

## Next steps

Bringing attention to the national college completion goals, projecting degrees needed per year, and disaggregating these projections by race/ethnicity are all tools to inform policy and practice. Therefore, *Excelencia* in Education intends to release, on an annual basis, a more succinct update on the national progress towards college degree completion goals from 2010 to 2020. To compliment this data tracking, *Excelencia* in Education will also work with other organizations to determine what we are doing, and still need to do, in policy and practice to meet our national goals. The anticipated result will be a roadmap of policies and practices that can help the nation reach its college completion goals.