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Access to the University of California for Graduates of Low-API High Schools

By Lisa Chavez and Gabino Arredondo

Inequality of access to California's system of public higher education, especially to the University of California, continues to be a pressing issue in the years following the passage of Proposition 209. This is illustrated by recent state and local initiatives that attempt to simplify the community college transfer process, the expansion of college eligibility criteria to consider inequality of educational opportunities, and the move to mandate, at the school district level, access to the A-G coursework series that is required for admission to the University of California.

The Center for Latino Policy Research is currently researching the pathways from California public high schools to the state's system of public higher education, focusing on the lowest performing schools as determined by their state ranking on the 2004 California Academic Performance

Index (API). The API is an accountability measurement of school performance on a series of standardized tests. Schools are ranked by deciles on a scale of one to ten with the bottom 10 percent assigned a "1" and the top ten percent assigned a "10". This research brief highlights some preliminary results.

In 2004, the California public school system graduated 343,484 students. Although Latinos, African-Americans and American-Indians comprised less than half of this graduating class (44 percent), they represented 74 percent of the 74,824 students who graduated from high schools ranked one through three (see Table 1). In contrast, these groups were significantly underrepresented among the graduates of the high schools ranked eight through ten. This corroborates a recent report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project that documented high levels of racial segregation in California's schools.

The lowest performing high schools

were also highly segregated by measures of socioeconomic status and parental education. Nearly 60 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced meals and only 18 percent came from families with at least one college/professionally educated parent. Besides varying in both racial-ethnic and socioeconomic concentration, high schools of different API rankings also varied in their percentage of graduates who completed the 15 courses required for CSU and UC eligibility with a grade of C or better. Only 27 percent of graduates of low-ranked high schools completed the course requirement compared with 33 and 50 percent of graduates from the middle and highest API ranked high schools.

Attending a low-performing and highly segregated school in California has deep implications for the type of resources available to students. For example, a recent report "The Status of the Teaching Profession 2005" showed that California's lowest performing schools tend to have

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of 2004 California Public High School* Graduates by API State Rank

2004 API State Rank	Number of High Schools	Total 2004 Graduates	URM** Graduates	Eligible Free/Reduced Lunch	Parents with College Education	Graduates who Completed "A-G" Coursework
Rank 1 - 3	254	74,824	74%	58%	18%	27%
Rank 4 - 7	374	121,703	42%	35%	30%	33%
Rank 8 - 10	288	101,798	18%	15%	55%	50%

* This analysis is restricted to the schools defined as regular "high schools" by the California Department of Education. These schools account for 90 percent of all schools that issued high school diplomas in 2004.

** Underrepresented minority groups - Latinos, African-Americans and American-Indians

fewer fully prepared teachers.

Likewise, an analysis by EdTrust revealed that the high-minority school districts in California receive less per-pupil funding than districts serving fewer minority students. Finally, according to the “Curriculum Opportunity Index” developed by EdTrust, only 17 percent of the state’s school districts provide all enrolled students with the opportunity to take the A-G coursework series, and this is inversely correlated with the enrollment of disadvantaged students. All of these factors, in turn, have implications for access to the University of California. Although nearly one quarter (24 percent) of public high school graduates attended a low-performing high school, only 14 percent of 2004 University of California freshmen did so (see Figure 1). In contrast, students attending the highest performing high schools represented

one-third (33 percent) of 2004 public high school graduates while over half (53 percent) of the fall 2004 UC freshmen from public high schools were from these same schools.

The forthcoming report by the Center for Latino Policy Research will document the transition from high school to higher education for these graduates and identify the conditions under which some low-performing high schools are more successful than others at facilitating access to higher education. ■



Lisa Chavez

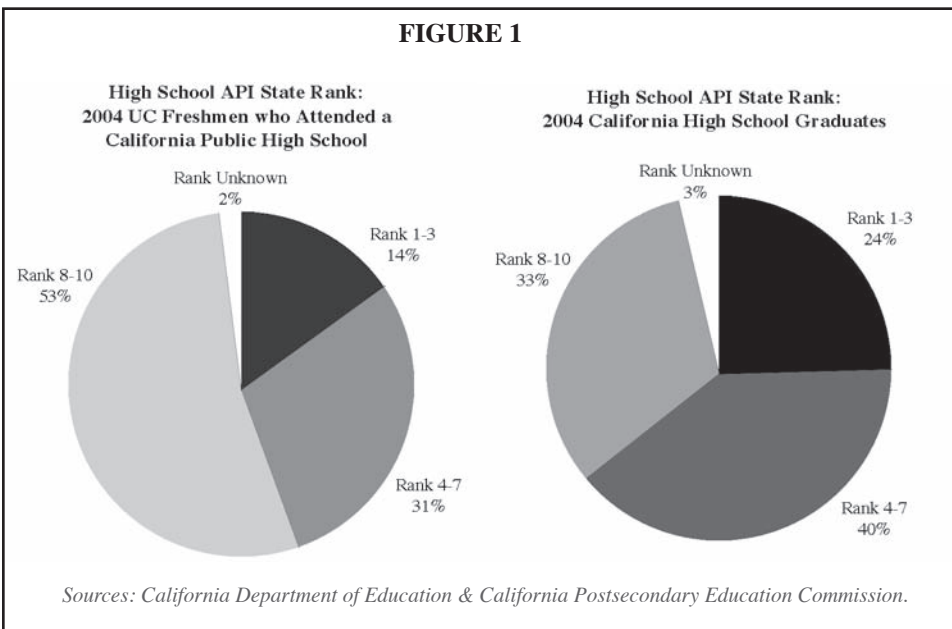
Lisa Chavez is a Research Associate at CLPR. Lisa received her Ph.D. in Sociology from UC Berkeley. A third generation Californian, she is committed to conducting policy-relevant research that contributes to the expansion of educational opportunities for students in her home state.



Gabino Arredondo

Gabino Arredondo is a Ph.D. student in UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education in its Language & Literacy, Society & Culture program and a Graduate Student Researcher for CLPR. His research interests include language socialization, identity formation, ethnography, urban school reform, and Chicana/o studies.

FIGURE 1



Center for Latino Policy Research-ISSC



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