



# EDUCATION NEWS

LA VOZ DE LA COMUNIDAD

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## Election 2010: What will this mean for Latino Students?

*On November 2nd, voters cast their ballot in the mid-term elections, resulting in one of the most dramatic midterm congressional swings since 1938. Republicans won control of the House of Representatives with a gain of 63 seats, minimized Democratic control of the Senate with the addition of six seats, and gained a total of seven Gubernatorial seats. Latino voters contributed 9% of the vote nationwide and, according to exit polls, voted 64% Democrat and 34% Republican as opposed to 69% Democrat and 30% Republican in 2006.*

The Latino community supported democratic candidates in key races, such as California Governor Jerry Brown (D) with 64% of the Latino vote and Nevada Senator Harry Reid (D) with 68%. Despite these Democratic voting tendencies amongst Latinos, three conservative Latino candidates New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez (R), Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval (R), and Florida Senator Marco Rubio (R) were elected, with substantial support from the Latino community, marking a victory for Latinos as well as Republicans.

The results reflect constituents' concerns about the economy and mark what will be significant changes in the 112<sup>th</sup> congress. Although education was not a primary issue in most campaign platforms, the election results may have major implications for education policy over the next two years. First and foremost, politicians that have been central to education reform in the past will no longer play the same role. The coalition that assembled the No Child Left Behind legislation—former Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Senator Judd Gregg (D-NH), Representative George Miller (D-CA), and Representative Boehner (R-OH)—has largely been disbanded. Rep. Miller has been replaced as chair of the House Education and Labor Committee by Rep. John Kline (R-MN); Rep. Boehner has assumed the role of Speaker of the House; Senator Gregg chose not to run and Senator Kennedy passed away. It is undecided what role Miller and Boehner will play in these new roles. A new set of key figures will have to emerge and their position on education is yet to be decided.

There will also be significant changes on critical education committees in the House and Senate. Both the House Education and Labor Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, charged with disbursing funds



*Continued on following page.*

## Election 2010

*Continued from previous page.*

from the Federal Treasury to government agencies such as the Department of Education, will most likely gain a dozen Republican members. In the Senate, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee is still chaired by Tom Harkin (D-IA) and is only projected to lose one seat. In the Senate Appropriations Committee, Democrats will most likely lose two or three seats, but notable change will occur on the Republican side where half of GOP committee members will be replaced<sup>2</sup>.

With the large wave of freshmen legislators entering Congress, it will take time for them to learn about legislative processes and the key issues before any significant legislation can be developed. Furthermore, many of these freshman legislators ran on a platform of small government and challenging the status quo—some going as far as calling for the abolition of the Department of Education<sup>3</sup>. This focus on fiscal responsibility, coupled with economic anxieties, will mean that additional funding for many current programs and new initiatives for students, and Latino students in particular, will be minimal.

There has been an optimistic view of opportunities for bipartisanship in education over the last few weeks. Education has traditionally been a bipartisan effort (i.e. NCLB under President George W. Bush in 2001) and passing some bipartisan legislation is in the interest of both parties in 2012, to prepare for the Presidential election, but there are a number of obstacles that could stand in the way. While the Obama administration has successfully made awards to states, in the Race to the Top program, the Investing in Innovation grants, and passed an Education jobs bill, it has yet to pass any comprehensive education legislation<sup>4</sup>. Complicating the analysis, the incoming Congress is extremely polarized. In addition to disagreements around issues such as reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB), federal spending, academic standards, and instruction for English Language Learner students between Democrats and Republicans, there is also disagreement within parties<sup>5</sup>. These tensions will most likely result in gridlock and make comprehensive reform an extremely difficult process.

In the case that comprehensive reform is

not possible, the administration and congress will have the option to postpone action until conditions are more favorable or embrace piecemeal reform. There are several options for passing education reform that would circumvent the usual consensus gathering processes in both chambers. The first is a slimmed reconciliation bill that allows only mandatory spending for programs, and no policy changes. Last, the administration can use its regulatory power to modify existing legislation. Often times seen as a means of “fixing” problematic legislation, regulatory reforms shut out interested constituencies and

four central areas: college and career readiness standards; improved data systems; teacher recruitment and development; and turning around low performing schools. The Race to the Top awardees will be implementing many new reforms and enhancing support of reforms that are currently underway. All of the winners propose utilizing various expanded learning opportunities to support student success: eight of the ten second round winners emphasize afterschool programs as a key part of their education reform efforts and four RtTT winners (the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maryland, and New York) mention utilizing

afterschool to increase STEM learning opportunities for students.

Though, in a critique of round one implementation, a report citing the National Center for Education Statistics data found that less than 1% of Latinos live in the winning

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Congress from the decision making process. While comprehensive reform does provide for broader discourse around education issues, incremental reform is still a valid option and is being pushed as the most viable option by a number of groups<sup>6</sup>.

Following is a list of education legislation and programs that could see some movement, or expansions, under the next congress and their implications for Latino students.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization** — The last reauthorization of this bill occurred in 2001 with No Child Left Behind. Congress was unable to pass an updated version of NCLB in 2007, when the last serious draft bill was developed. The Obama Administration has released its “Blueprint for Education Reform,” which provides a set of guidelines for administration priorities and has expressed dedication to reauthorization in the new year<sup>7</sup>. Among initiatives for ELLs are competitive grants for successful ELL education programs, uniform systems to identify ELLs, and mechanisms to evaluate different language instruction models. See LULAC Education News May 2010 for more information.

**Race to the Top** — The Department of Education provided \$4 billion dollars in 2010 in the first two rounds of competitive grants to eleven states and the District of Columbia. The Obama administration has since requested an additional \$1.35 billion dollars for round 3 in 2011. While the guidelines for state reform were left up to the states, the grants prioritized

states of Delaware and Tennessee<sup>8</sup>. Round two funding was able to reach an improved 22% of the Latino population<sup>9</sup>. However, the geographic distribution of RtTT winners is limited to predominantly east coast states that have a relatively new and growing Latino population. States with historically large Latino populations such as Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California did not receive grants.

Concerns over ELL considerations have also been voiced. The 12 grant winners in round two included only 16% of the nation’s ELL population<sup>10</sup>. Groups have also expressed concern that ELL considerations were not fully taken into account, arguing that its discussion of closing the achievement gap and including broad stakeholder support did not go far enough in supporting ELLs.

**Investing in Innovation (i3)** — In 2009, The i3 fund provided \$650 million dollars to support public-private partnerships in order to improve student achievement through innovative practices. The administration has requested \$500 million for 2011, though it is unlikely to be available as Congress has yet to complete funding for Fiscal Year 2011. The i3 grant was awarded to 49 states. The geographic diversity of the grant means that there is potentially a great deal of work within the Latino community. More than half of the grants were intended to benefit ELLs and students with disabilities<sup>11</sup>. However, the extent to which these public or private entities serve, and work with, the Latino community varies among states.

*Continued on page 4.*

# The Nation's Report Card, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Results are in!

*The results of the Department of Education initiative, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (the Nation's Report Card), were recently released for 12th grade students in 11 states. This national assessment, given periodically, measures academic proficiency in math, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history among 4th, 8th, and 12th graders at the national, state, and local level.*

Started in 1969, its goal has been to provide a measurement tool that is nation-wide and to report progress over time. While based on samples of the population, the results are nationally representative. Complete results of the assessment can be found at <http://nationsreportcard.gov/about.asp>.

Although participation for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in Title I funded schools is mandated under No Child Left Behind, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade assessment remains optional to states. In 2009, 11 states participated, testing 52,000 students in reading and 49,000 in math. The average reading score rose slightly since 2005, but was still lower than 1992. The number of students performing at or above proficient rose 3% from 2005 to 38% in 2009. However, scores were not statistically different from scores prior to 2005. The achievement gap also signals room for improvement as there were no significant improvements since 1992. Hispanics, African Americans, and American Indians/Alaska Natives have seen no significant change in scores since 1992<sup>1</sup>.

Math scores hint at slightly more progress.

In 2005 the NAEP made changes to the test framework and allowed accommodations for ELLs. 9 Accommodations are provided to students with disabilities and English language learners if they are deemed necessary. They can include extra time, preferential seating, or directions read aloud in the student's native language. For further information see <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/inclusion.asp>, meaning that the current results cannot be compared to assessments prior to the change. The percentage of students at or above proficient rose from 23% in 2005 to 26% in 2009. The most pronounced gains were among the Asian/Pacific Islanders (the category of Asian/Pacific Islander does not disaggregate data for Asian and Southeast Asian students, hiding significant differences in student achievement) and the American Indian/Alaska Natives. However, despite gains across the board, achievement gaps saw no significant change<sup>2</sup>.

Latino children remain twice as likely as white children to score in the woeful "below basic" category at both the fourth- and eighth-grade reading levels on the National

Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). For the two in five Latino eighth-graders nationally scoring "below basic," the test's lowest category, the odds against earning a high-school diploma are extremely steep.

Worse still, however, is that Latino proficiency levels essentially failed to improve between 2002 and 2009. This fact holds even more daunting implications considering the Pew Charitable Trusts' projection that 29 percent of the U.S. population will be Hispanic in 2050.

The 12<sup>th</sup> grade results show marginal gains, but are not nearly as impressive as improvements in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This can be interpreted in two ways; either the test does not accurately portray 12<sup>th</sup> grade students' abilities or the assessment provides evidence of a struggling education system. Some, including former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, have criticized the test as it is not tied to any meaningful consequences<sup>3</sup>. Unlike state assessments and college entrance exams, the results of the NAEP are not individually scored and have no bearing on grades or college acceptance, increasing the likelihood that 12<sup>th</sup> grade students won't take the exam seriously.

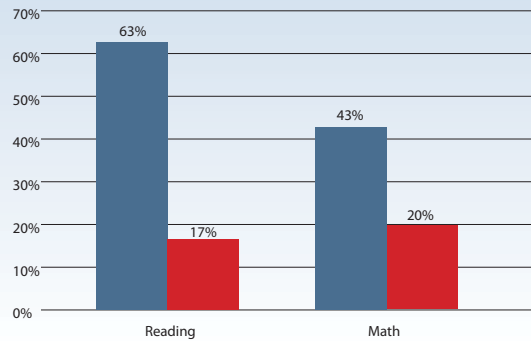
Despite its limitations, officials have acknowledged that the assessment is rigorous. The National Assessment Governing Board has even been studying the test's overlap with other college entrance exams<sup>4</sup>. Other studies have drawn attention to the differences between state assessments and the NAEP. In a comparison of 2009 results in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the Alliance for Excellent Education found that the students scored significantly lower on the NAEP than the state tests with an 39 % average gap in reading scores and 30% average gap in math. Five states had a reading gap larger than 60% and four states had a math gap larger than 50%<sup>5</sup>. These numbers demonstrate that state assessments are not portraying an accurate picture of student achievement. For example, New Mexico state tests showed that more than half of students were proficient in reading and

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## New Mexico Eighth-Grade Proficiency as Measured by New Mexico State Tests and NAEP for SY 2008–09

■ State Test  
■ National (NAEP) Test



## The Nation's Report Card

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more than 40 percent in math. Yet the NAEP showed that less than 20% of students were proficient, in either subject, when tested by the NAEP's more rigorous standards.

These discrepancies demonstrate the overwhelming variability when it comes to

state standards and assessments. While some states like Connecticut and Massachusetts have relatively rigorous standards, many remain inadequate. In an attempt to provide a greater and consistent level of accountability, the Common Core Standards have been developed and adopted by more than 40 states and the District of Columbia. Working toward the goal of college and career readiness, they were designed

as clearer, higher standards that better position US students to compete in the global economy. They allow for aligned curricula and improved assessments that address the vast disparities between state and national tests.

It is clear that the state-led Common Core will require sufficient funding, political will, and collaboration at national, state, and local levels to be successful. Although it will be a challenging transition, NAEP demonstrates the need for nationally comparable data. The state assessment shortcomings that are highlighted by the NAEP warrant improved measures to ensure student success throughout all states.

## Endnotes

- 1 Source: [http://nationsreportcard.gov/grade12\\_2009\\_report/](http://nationsreportcard.gov/grade12_2009_report/)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Source: [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2010/11/12th\\_grade\\_naep\\_scores\\_are\\_mea.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2010/11/12th_grade_naep_scores_are_mea.html)
- 4 Source: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/11/22/13nagb.h30.html>
- 5 Source: [http://all4ed.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/05192010](http://all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/05192010)

## Please Join Us at:

**February 9–10, 2011**

LULAC National Legislative Conference and Gala  
Washington, D.C.

**March 4–5, 2011**

LULAC National Conference for the Elderly  
Bayamon, Puerto Rico

**April 8–9, 2011**

LULAC National Women's Conference  
Chicago, IL

**June 27–July 2, 2011**

LULAC National Convention  
Duke Energy Convention Center  
Cincinnati, OH

## Election 2010

*Continued from page 2.*

**Common Core Standards** — More than 40 states and the District of Columbia have signed on to a set of common standards that address low state standards. Although these are a state-led effort, the Department of Education has endorsed the initiative through Race to the Top and its ESEA Blueprint.

These standards will have a significant impact on Latinos across the country. While a few states with large Latino populations have not adopted the standards, the majority of Latinos will see dramatic changes. Keeping college and career readiness in mind, the Common Core standards are much higher than many previous state standards. This makes a well supported transition necessary for success. The standards have taken into account advice from policy makers, experts, teachers, and community advocates to ensure broad-based support at all levels.

While sometimes criticized for their lack of communication with ELL advocates, the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council

of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has been working with organizations around assessment, teacher development, curricula alignment, and community involvement to support students in this complex transition. Organizations across the country, including LULAC (individually, and with, the Campaign for High School Equity) have been involved in the development of the standards and are now shifting their efforts to work with state Departments of Education on ensuring that implementation is done properly and with community input.

**The Dream Act** — This bipartisan legislation was intended to allow undocumented high school graduates brought to the United States at a young age to a six year conditional path to citizenship following completion of a college degree or two years of military service. The bill passed the house, but was rejected in the Senate. President Obama has committed to the bill's reintroduction, but the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress will present a significant challenge.

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