

REPORT BRIEF

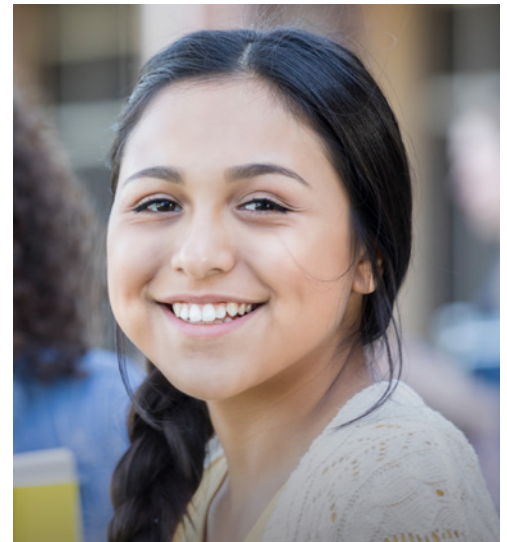
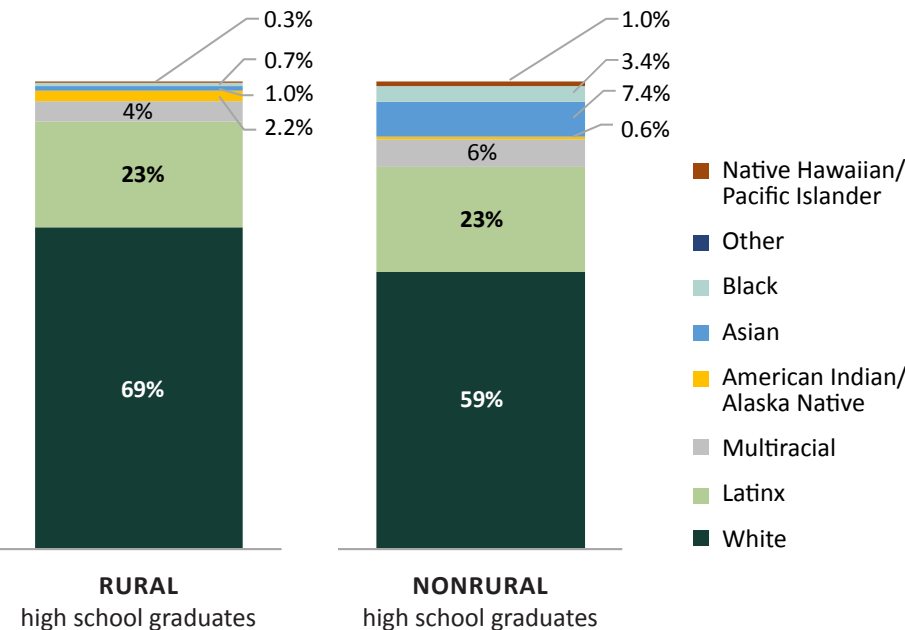
Supporting Rural Students in Oregon:
Latinx College Enrollment and Persistence

In rural Oregon, nearly one-third of high school graduates identify as students of color, with Latinx representing the largest ethnicity.

A recent collaboration between The Ford Family Foundation and Education Northwest found that rural high school graduates in Oregon enrolled, persisted, and completed college at lower rates than their nonrural peers.

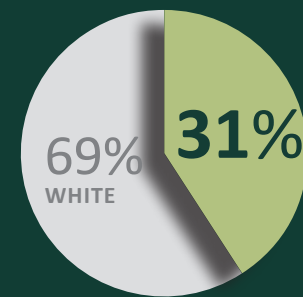
The study also found that 31 percent of rural high school graduates identify as students of color, compared to 41 percent of nonrural high school graduates, and that within nearly all racial and ethnic groups, rural students had lower outcomes than their nonrural counterparts.¹

There is broad diversity within rural Oregon. However, in this brief we focus primarily on Latinx students as they represent the largest historically underserved ethnicity in the state: 23 percent of Oregon’s rural and nonrural high school graduates in 2018/19 identify as Latinx. Additionally, the Latinx population in Oregon has grown in recent years and is projected to continue to grow.²



DIVERSITY IN OREGON'S RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

CLASS OF 2019



of rural high school graduates identify as **STUDENTS OF COLOR**

23% of rural high school graduates identify as **Latinx**

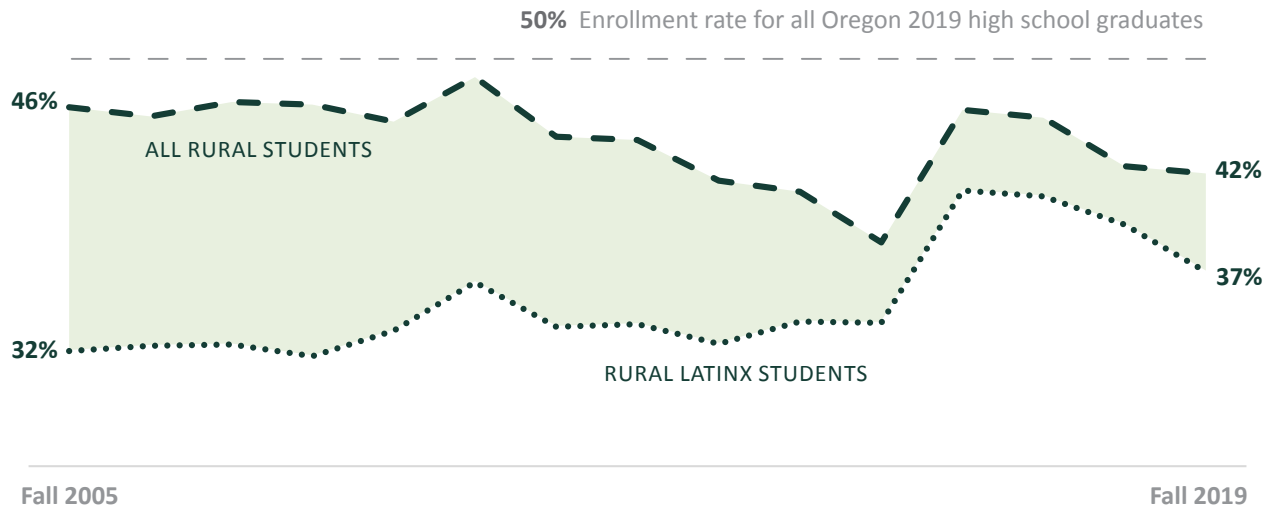
15,416 **RURAL** Oregon high school students graduated in 2018/19.

¹ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) students are the exception to this pattern. Forty percent of rural NHPI high school graduates (out of 42 students total) enrolled in college compared to 32 percent of nonrural NHPI high school graduates (out of 219 students total).

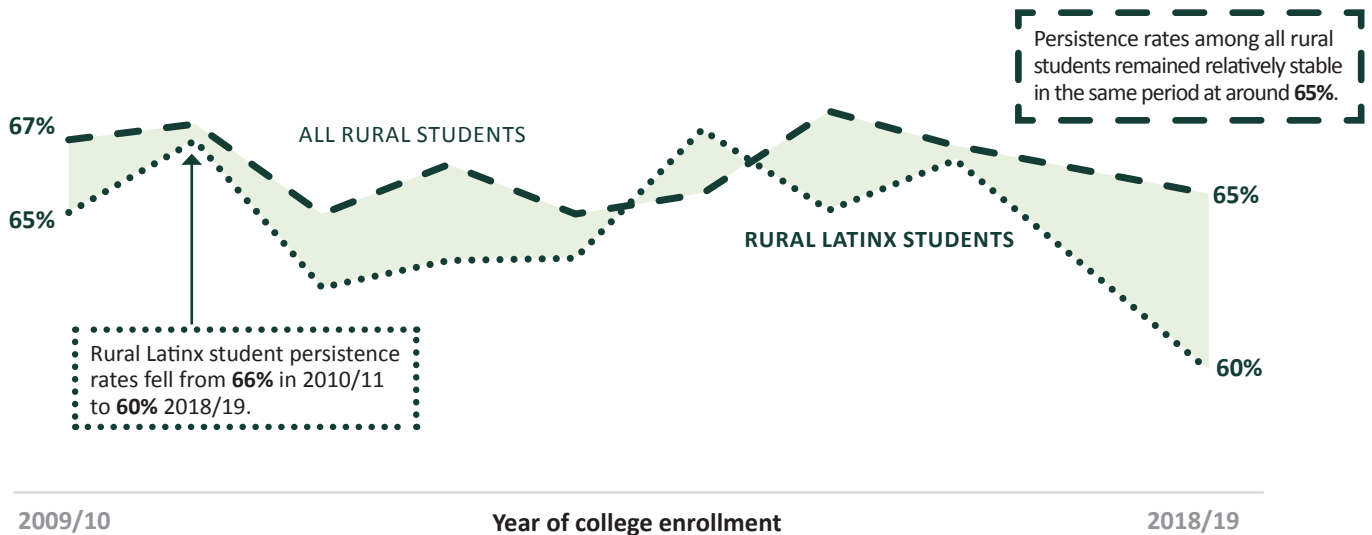
² The percentage of individuals who identified as Latinx in Oregon increased from 2.5 percent in 1980 to 13.4 percent in 2019 (Gibson & Jung, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Projections suggest that the overall share of Oregon’s high school graduates who are students of color will increase from 37 percent to 42 percent between 2019 and 2036, and that much of the increase will be driven by students who identify as Latinx or two or more races (WICHE, 2020).

In Oregon, over the last 14 years, college enrollment for rural students who identify as Latinx has improved – but college persistence has not.

The immediate college enrollment rate is increasing for rural Latinx students.



First-year to second-year college persistence is declining for rural Latinx students.



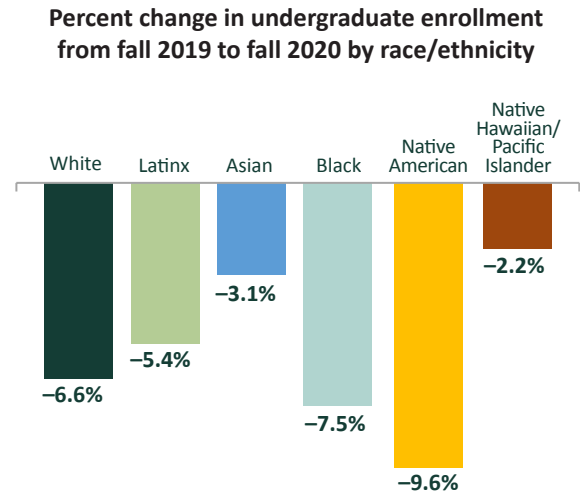
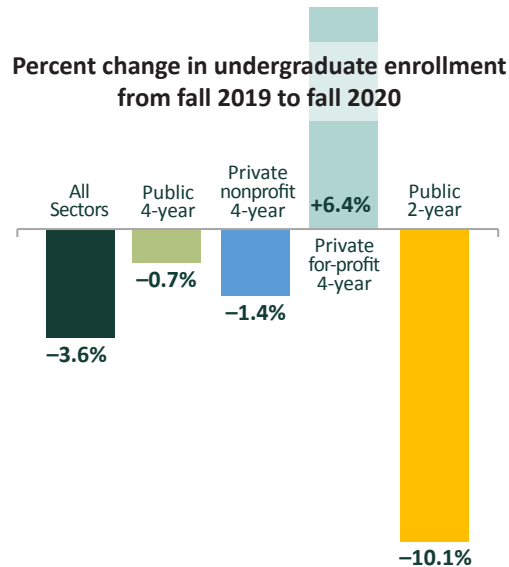
There are similar postsecondary patterns for nonrural Latinx high school graduates. The immediate enrollment rate for nonrural Latinx students increased from 31 percent (fall 2005) to 40 percent (fall 2019), whereas the persistence rate for nonrural Latinx students fell from 67 percent (2009/10) to 62 percent (2018/19).

In addition to falling college persistence, **only 38 percent of rural Latinx students who first enrolled in postsecondary education in 2013/14 completed any certificate or degree within six years**, compared to 44 percent of all rural students and 40 percent of nonrural Latinx students.

Source: Education Northwest's analysis of National Student Clearinghouse data, which represents 99 percent of students in postsecondary institutions nationwide.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR OREGON: Emerging national research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected college enrollment.

Emerging research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected students from all backgrounds, particularly low-income students and students of color. The greatest impact has been on those attending two-year public colleges, which is the pathway of choice for the majority of rural students. This impact threatens the positive trends seen in Latinx student enrollment and success in recent years (Howell et al., 2021). These trends and projections are particularly concerning given the current size and anticipated growth of Oregon's Latinx population, and the individual and societal benefits associated with earning a postsecondary degree or credential, such as higher earnings, increased likelihood of employment, higher levels of civic engagement, and better health (Ma et al., 2019).



Source: National Student Clearinghouse, 2020

How can we support rural Latinx students in Oregon?



1. Increase opportunities for rural Latinx students to take more academically rigorous coursework

Students who participate in rigorous coursework during high school are more likely to enroll and succeed in college than similar students who do not take these courses (Hodara & Pierson, 2018). Educators can focus efforts on expanding access to rigorous coursework for Latinx students and English learner students, a group that is largely Latinx. English learner students have historically been tracked into lower-level courses and excluded from core or advanced content in high school (Callahan, 2005; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Morita Mullaney et al., 2020; Umansky, 2016).



2. Address financial barriers facing rural Latinx students and families

In 2018/19, 93 percent of rural Latinx high school graduates had ever been eligible for free or reduced-price lunch while enrolled in Oregon public schools (compared to 89 percent of nonrural Latinx high school graduates and 74 percent of all rural high school graduates). Education stakeholders can acknowledge the additional financial barriers facing rural Latinx students and families and make efforts to support increased awareness and knowledge of opportunities for financial aid to pursue higher education.



3. Invest more in community colleges and the students they serve to improve outcomes

Community colleges still serve as an important pathway for many students. Education stakeholders can also continue to take efforts to support these institutions and the students they serve.



4. Encourage rural students to explore all educational pathways beyond high school

Some students may be more likely to succeed at a selective, four-year college or university. Education stakeholders can encourage rural Latinx students to broaden their higher education aspirations to include these institutions, when possible.

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