

Hispanic students are making steady math progress

By [Lyndsey Layton](#) November 10 at 12:01 AM

Hispanic students have made significant gains on federal math tests during the past decade, and Hispanic public school students in major cities including Boston, Charlotte, Houston and the District have made some of the most consistent progress, according to a [report](#) released Monday.

Child Trends Hispanic Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research center, analyzed 10 years of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, that U.S. students have taken every two years since the early 1990s. Also known as the Nation's Report Card, [NAEP is the country's most consistent measure](#) of K-12 progress.

Between 2003 and 2013, when the most recent NAEP tests were given, the average math scores for Hispanic students in U.S. public schools rose nine points in fourth grade and 13 points in eighth grade. NAEP is graded on a scale of 1 to 500; the gains realized by Hispanic students are roughly equivalent to one grade level.

Hispanics attending public schools in major cities posted similar gains, with 10-point and 13-point increases in grades four and eight, respectively.

That's surprising, said Natalia Pane, author of the report and senior vice president of research operations at Child Trends. "It's really interesting what's going on in the large cities," Pane said. "Our large cities were able to keep pace

when they've got such higher proportions of students coming from low-income families."

[Child Trends](#) is focused on the country's 17.5 million Hispanic children and teens because they are the fastest-growing demographic in U.S. public schools.

"With Hispanic students accounting for nearly one in four of U.S. children and rapidly growing, their math achievement in school today foreshadows our national scores tomorrow," Pane said. "This is important because we know that students who are successful in mathematics are more likely to graduate from high school, enter college, and have better-paying jobs in the future."

The study did not examine the achievement gap between Hispanic and white students, which has been narrowing but still remains significant. Pane's research also did not address factors behind the steady climb of Hispanic test scores, but she offered a few theories.

Compared with a decade ago, many urban school districts in recent years are "focused on using data more, increasing instructional time, reducing suspensions, developing programs to target English language acquisition," she said.

The recent transition by many school districts to the [Common Core](#), national K-12 standards for math and reading, and professional training for teachers might also be having an effect, she said. "They've got maybe more rigorous standards and better teacher training," Pane said.

Some districts have made a concerted effort to reach out to Hispanic families and get parents involved in schools, she said.

School districts where Hispanic students made the most progress in fourth- and eighth-grade math include Charlotte, Miami-Dade, Hillsborough County (Fla.), Austin, Dallas, Houston and Boston. Cities where Hispanic students have made significant gains include Atlanta, Chicago, Albuquerque, New York,

Baltimore, Milwaukee, the District of Columbia and Jefferson County, Ky., according to the study.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, which represents major urban public school systems, said he thinks the math scores of Hispanic students in major cities is propelling the jump in state and national scores.

“The cities enroll such a large proportion of the nation’s Hispanic kids; I think that’s driving the state numbers,” he said.

Casserly said he doubted the increase in math scores has to do with the Common Core, since the most recent scores were based on NAEP tests administered in 2013, and most states only began rolling out the new standards in earnest the same year. But he said major urban districts have gotten better at educating Hispanic students.

“Instead of so readily tracking them into watered-down instruction or keeping them in bilingual programs for so long, our districts are giving Hispanic kids better access to a more rigorous instructional program,” Casserly said. “And they’re just getting better at using their data to figure out why some groups are not doing as well and tailoring their instructional programming around what the data are telling them.”

Between 2003 and 2013, Hispanic students in fourth grade attending traditional public schools in the District jumped 21 points, the equivalent of two grades. Eighth-graders jumped 16 points.

Hispanic students in the District were among the lowest-scoring in 2003 compared with other large, urban districts, but by 2013 they pulled into the mid-range, Pane said.

Cities where students made the fewest gains during that decade include Los Angeles, Cleveland, Fresno, Calif., and Detroit.

The states where Hispanic students made the biggest gains in fourth-grade math include Indiana, Hawaii, North Carolina and Florida. In eighth grade, that group includes New Jersey, Texas and Maryland. States where Hispanics made the fewest gains include Utah, California, Connecticut, Oregon, Idaho, Rhode Island and Nebraska.

“It matters a lot where you live,” Pane said.

The vast majority of the nation’s Hispanic children in 2013 — more than 90 percent — were born in the United States. Most of those children had family connections to Mexico, and the rest were connected to Puerto Rico, followed by El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and other countries in Central America and South America.