

## RESEARCH BRIEF

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**Over the past 14 years, educational attainment among Puerto Ricans in the United States has been slowly improving. In 2000, 63 percent of Puerto Ricans 25 years of age and older had a high school degree or higher versus 75 percent in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Similarly, only 12.5 percent of Puerto Ricans had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2000 versus 16 percent in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Even though educational attainment has been steadily increasing, the disparity between educational attainment among Puerto Ricans versus non-Hispanic whites and other Hispanic subpopulations has remained constant.**



For instance, the disparity between Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanic whites earning a bachelor's degree has hovered around a 15-percentage point difference between these two groups over the past 14 years (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

In New York City, where Puerto Ricans make up 26 percent of Hispanic youth (ages 16 through 24), the disparity in educational achievement between Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanic whites is even more pronounced (Treschan 2010). In New York City in 2014, 13 percent of Puerto Ricans had a bachelor's degree or higher, versus 57 percent of non-Hispanic whites, a 44-percentage point difference (U.S. Census 2014). In the U.S., 16 percent of Puerto Ricans had received a bachelor's degree or higher versus 34 percent for non-Hispanic whites, an 18-point percentage differential. The disparities in educational achievement in New York City across all levels of attainment are almost twice the disparities nationally. Additionally, the education attainment gap beyond high school between Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics as a whole is greater among males than among females.

On the other hand, Puerto Ricans have managed to shrink this disparity from 2000 to 2014 in both New York City (by 3 percentage points) and the United States (by 7.6 percentage points) of high school graduates and higher. For the Puerto Rican population, this means that a higher percentage of the population is successfully progressing through the education pipeline, enabling them to more easily enter the job market and have higher lifetime earnings (Visser and Meléndez 2011).

In 2010 a study that examined Hispanic school, work, and income trends in New York City, researchers from the Community Service Society found that school enrollment disparities between Puerto Ricans and students of other races and ethnicities were even more pronounced for New York City than for the nation as a whole (Treschan 2010). Data from the CSS report, derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, indicated that Puerto Rican youth are the most disadvantaged of all comparable groups in terms of access to services, educational attainment and rates of poverty, with 33.4 percent of their households having incomes under the Federal Poverty Level (Treschan, 2010). A more recent study by researchers

at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, confirmed persistent disparities for youth in New York City (Visser and Meléndez 2011).

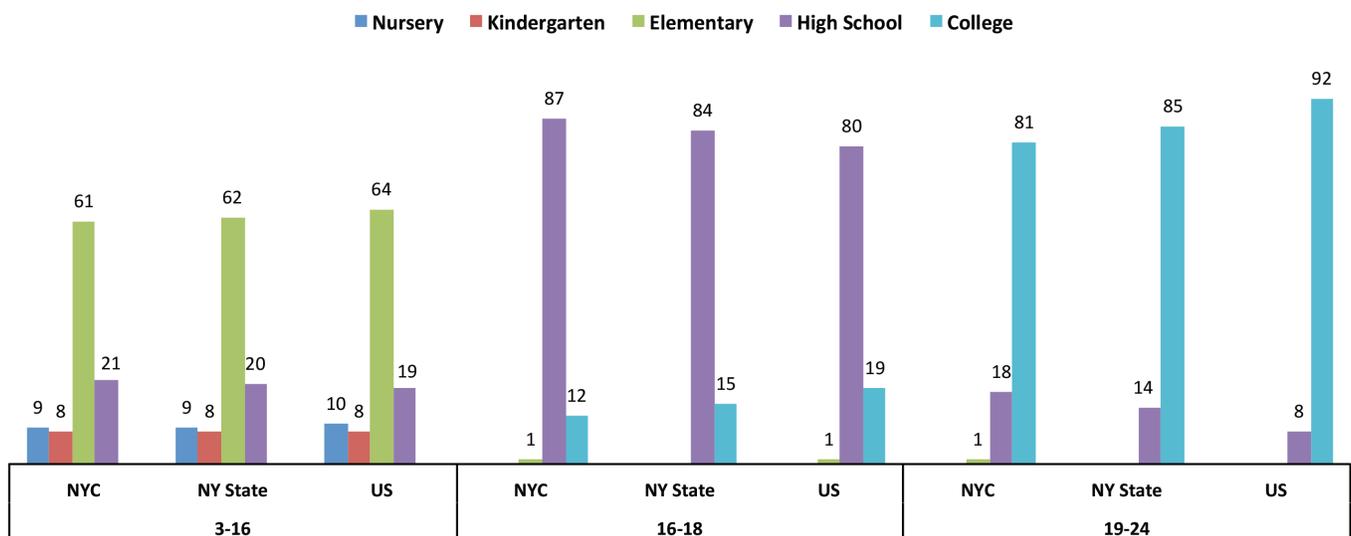
### DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, POPULATION 3-YEARS-AND-OVER ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

We examined the most recent school enrollment and attainment data from the U.S. Census Bureau, for the year 2014 for the U.S., New York City, and New York State. As expected, Puerto Ricans, non-Hispanic whites, and Hispanics have

relatively equal enrollment percentages in New York City, New York State, and the U.S. from nursery through elementary school and ages 3–16. Enrollment disparities between these three groups and all three geographic locations begin to appear at age 16 (refer to figures 1a, 1b and 1c).

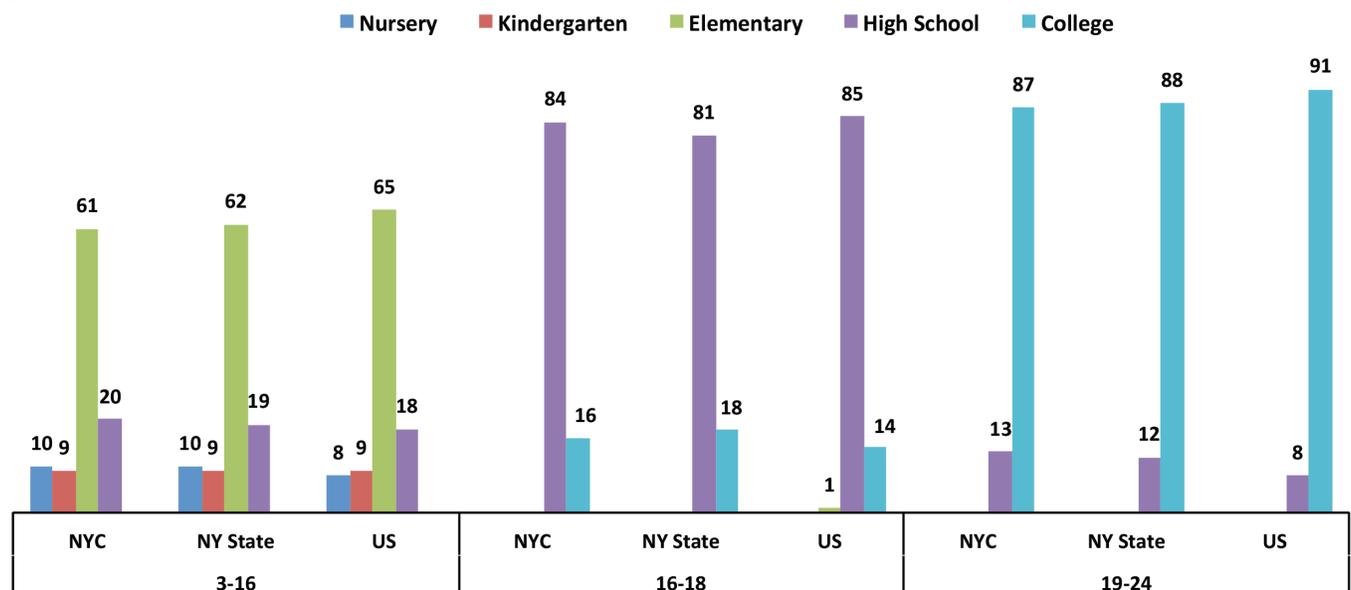
At ages 16-18, a higher percentage of Puerto Ricans are enrolled in high school, and fewer in college or graduate school than both non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics in both New York City and New York State. Another noticeable difference is that whites in New York City are doing

**Figure 1a. School Enrollment of Puerto Ricans in 2014 by Age (percent)**



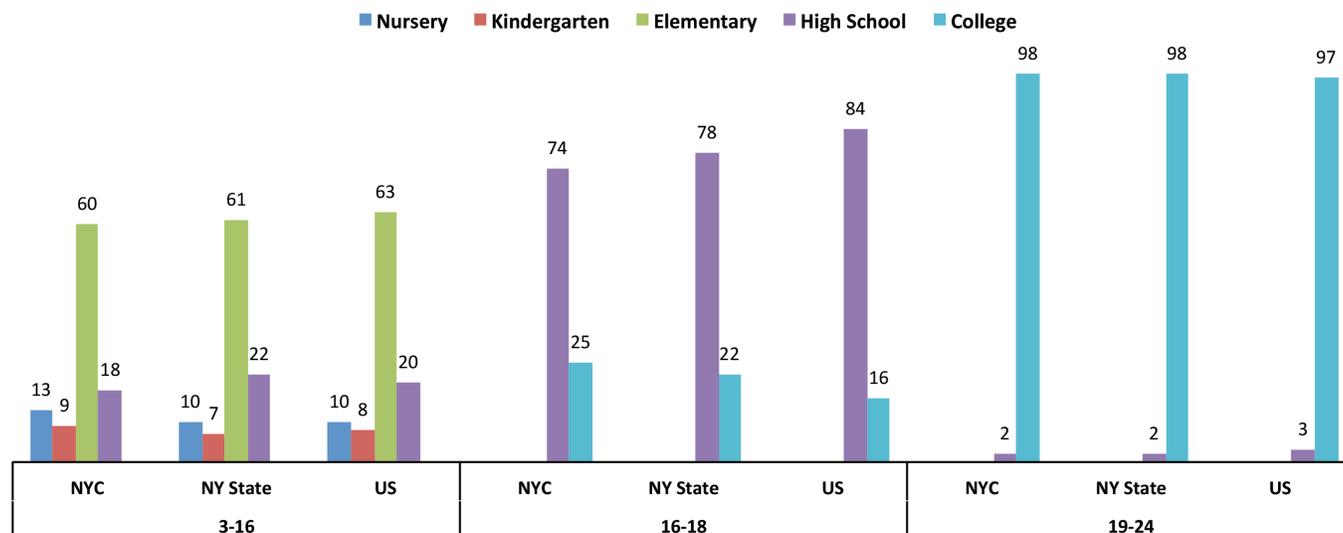
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

**Figure 1b. School Enrollment of Hispanics in 2014 by Age (percent)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

**Figure 1c. School Enrollment of Non-Hispanic White in 2014 by Age (percent)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

much better in higher education enrollment from ages 16–18 than they are in the state and the rest of the country. On the other hand, the percentage of Puerto Ricans enrolled in college and graduate school in this age bracket is higher in the U.S. (19%) than in the state (15%) or in NYC (12%). In NYC, 16- to 18-year-old Hispanics are also doing slightly better (16%) in higher education enrollment than are Hispanics nationwide (14%).

The disparity in enrollment becomes even more pronounced at ages 19–24. In New York City, twice as many Puerto Ricans remain in high school (18%) than all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. (8%). Furthermore, there is a 16-percentage point difference between Puerto Ricans in high school in New York City (18%) in this age bracket and non-Hispanic whites (2%), while the reverse is true for college or graduate school: 98 percent of 19-to-24 year-old non-Hispanic whites in New York City are enrolled in college versus 81 percent of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans in this age group in New York City are also falling behind in higher education enrollment in comparison to Puerto Ricans in the U.S. (87%). The higher education enrollment of Hispanics and Puerto Ricans in this age bracket is relatively equal nationwide (8%), with Hispanic higher education enrollment falling behind in New York City (18% vs. 13%) as well as in New York State (14% vs. 12%) (U.S. Census 2014).

These enrollment data show that Puerto Ricans are taking longer to graduate from high school and are enrolling in college and graduate school at lower percentages than their

non-Hispanic white counterparts, especially in New York City.

### DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25 AND OVER)

Nationwide, Puerto Ricans show substantial educational attainment disparities (see Figure 2). While 21 percent of non-Hispanic whites completed a bachelor’s degree and 13 percent a graduate or professional degree, only 11 percent of Puerto Ricans completed a bachelor’s degree and 5 percent a graduate or professional degree. Hispanics show a similar disparity, with 9 percent completing a bachelor’s degree and 4 percent a graduate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

Among Puerto Ricans 25 years of age and older in New York City had the greatest disparity in college attainment when compared to non-Hispanic whites in 2014. While 31 percent of non-Hispanic whites completed a bachelor’s degree and 26 percent a graduate or professional degree, only 9 percent of Puerto Ricans completed a bachelor’s degree and 4 percent a graduate or professional degree (See Table 1). The disparity in college attainment in New York City among those 25 years of age and older was in the order of more than 4 to 1 for non-Hispanic whites and Puerto Ricans. While these disparities in college attainment in New York City are striking (57% vs. 13%), they are much less pronounced for the nation as a whole in the order of 2 to 1 (34% vs. 16%). Hispanics in New York City showed a similar level of college attainment disparity compared to Puerto

Ricans, with 10 percent of Hispanics with a bachelor’s degree and 5 percent with a graduate or professional degree.

What should also be noted is that non-Hispanic whites in New York City have higher rates of bachelor’s degrees and graduate school attainment (a total of 57%) than non-Hispanic whites in New York State (a total of 41%) and in the U.S. (a total of 34%). Similarly, Hispanics in New York City have similar rates of bachelors and graduate school attainment (a total of 15%) as Hispanics in New York State (a total of 16%). As noted above, the opposite is true for Puerto Ricans.

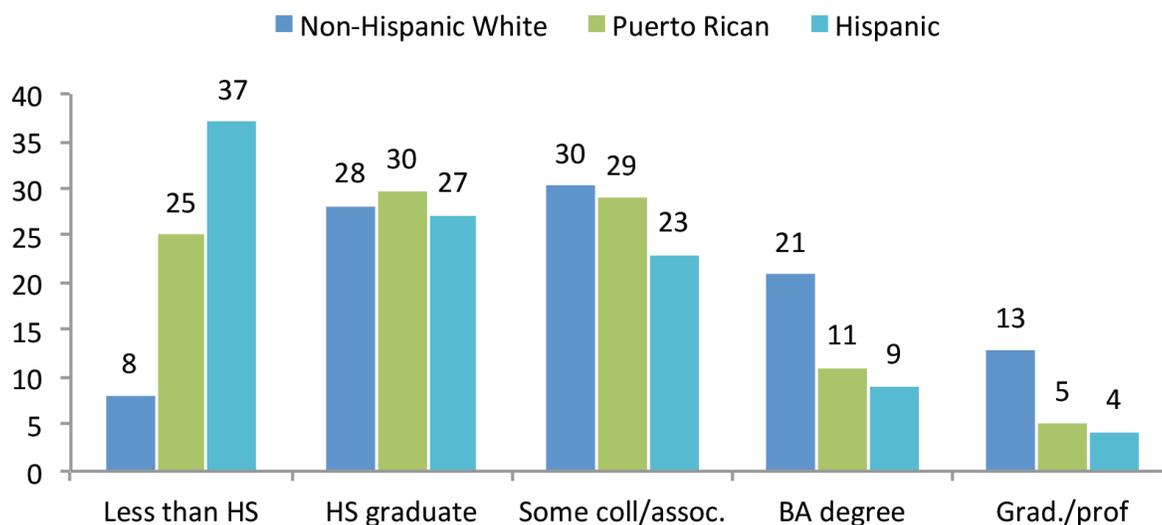
## GENDER DISPARITIES

In addition to educational attainment disparities among white, Hispanic, and Puerto Rican populations in the United States, disparities in educational attainment at the college and graduate level are also evident along gender lines,

these disparities are more pronounced for Puerto Rican men than for Puerto Rican women for ages 25 and above. Referring to Figures 3 and 4, the percentage of non-Hispanic white men in 2014 who completed or were enrolled in college or graduate school (61%) was almost double that of Puerto Rican men (34%). This disparity was not as wide for women, where 66 percent of non-Hispanic white women had completed or are enrolled in college or graduate school, while only 45 percent of Puerto Rican women had similar attainment.

Further, the report by the Community Service Society states that Puerto Rican males in particular “emerge as the most disadvantaged youth group in New York City, with rates of school enrollment, educational attainment, and employment lower than any other comparable group, including young black males,” (Treschan, 2010). In 2014, approximately 18 percent of Puerto Rican men between the ages of 16 and 24 were not in school, employed or

**Figure 2. Educational Attainment 25 years and over in the United States in 2014 (percent)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

**Table 1: Bachelor’s and Graduate School Attainment (percent)**

	Non-Hispanic White		Puerto Rican		Hispanic	
	B.A.	Grad.	B.A.	Grad.	B.A.	Grad.
US	21	13	11	5	9	4
New York State	22	19	9	5	11	5
New York City	31	26	9	4	10	5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

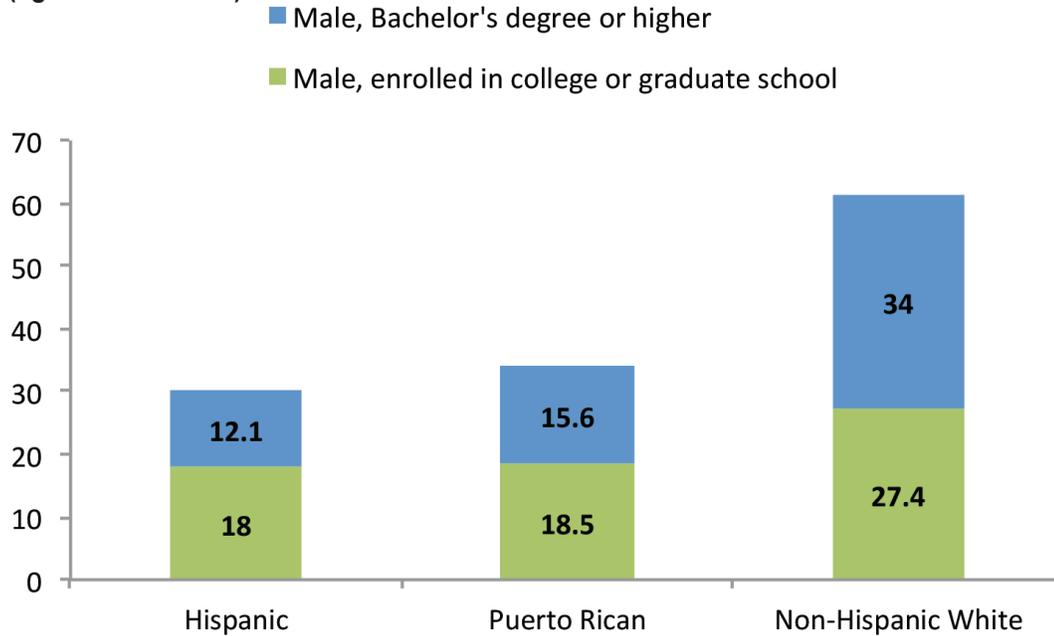
looking for work, compared with 14 percent of Dominicans and 4 percent of Mexicans (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

### CONCLUSIONS

One of the main consequences of a broken educational pipeline and significant educational disparities is that Puerto Ricans are concentrated in low-wage jobs and experience

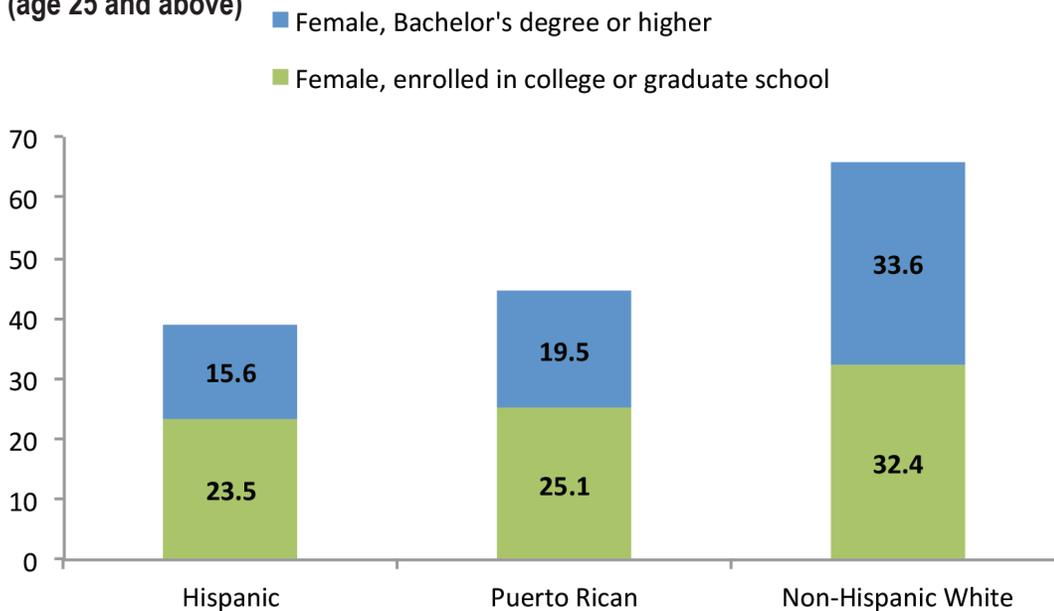
higher rates of unemployment and poverty than other Hispanic subgroups (see “Jobs and Income” chapter). There are several factors that might contribute to the low rates of educational attainment among the Puerto Rican population. These include limited of human and financial capital, fewer family resources, less access to early education and higher residential segregation. These conditions expose youth to

**Figure 3. Male percent of College and Graduate Level Educational Attainment in the United States in 2014 (age 25 and above)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

**Figure 4. Female percent of College and Graduate Level Educational Attainment in the United States in 2014 (age 25 and above)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014, 1-year estimate

structural disadvantage resulting in high rates of crime and a higher likelihood of dropping out of high school (Kasinitz et al. 2009). In New York City specifically, many families are not likely to go outside of the public school system, which typically receives less funding in poorer areas than those in neighborhoods with lower rates of poverty (Kasinitz et al. 2009). Additionally, many families have little knowledge about academically selective high schools, which require students to test into (Kasinitz et al. 2009).

In creating policies to lessen this disparity, there are some pathways programs with a proven record of servicing the needs of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics,

especially in the 18 to 24 age cohort. These programs can be strengthened, replicated, expanded to other age cohorts, and their best practices disseminated. However, other programs that promote higher education must be strengthened that focus explicitly on serving the Puerto Rican and Hispanic communities. Additionally, parental involvement and culturally responsive programs and policies throughout the education pipeline are important solutions for improving educational attainment among Puerto Ricans (Visser and Meléndez 2011).

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