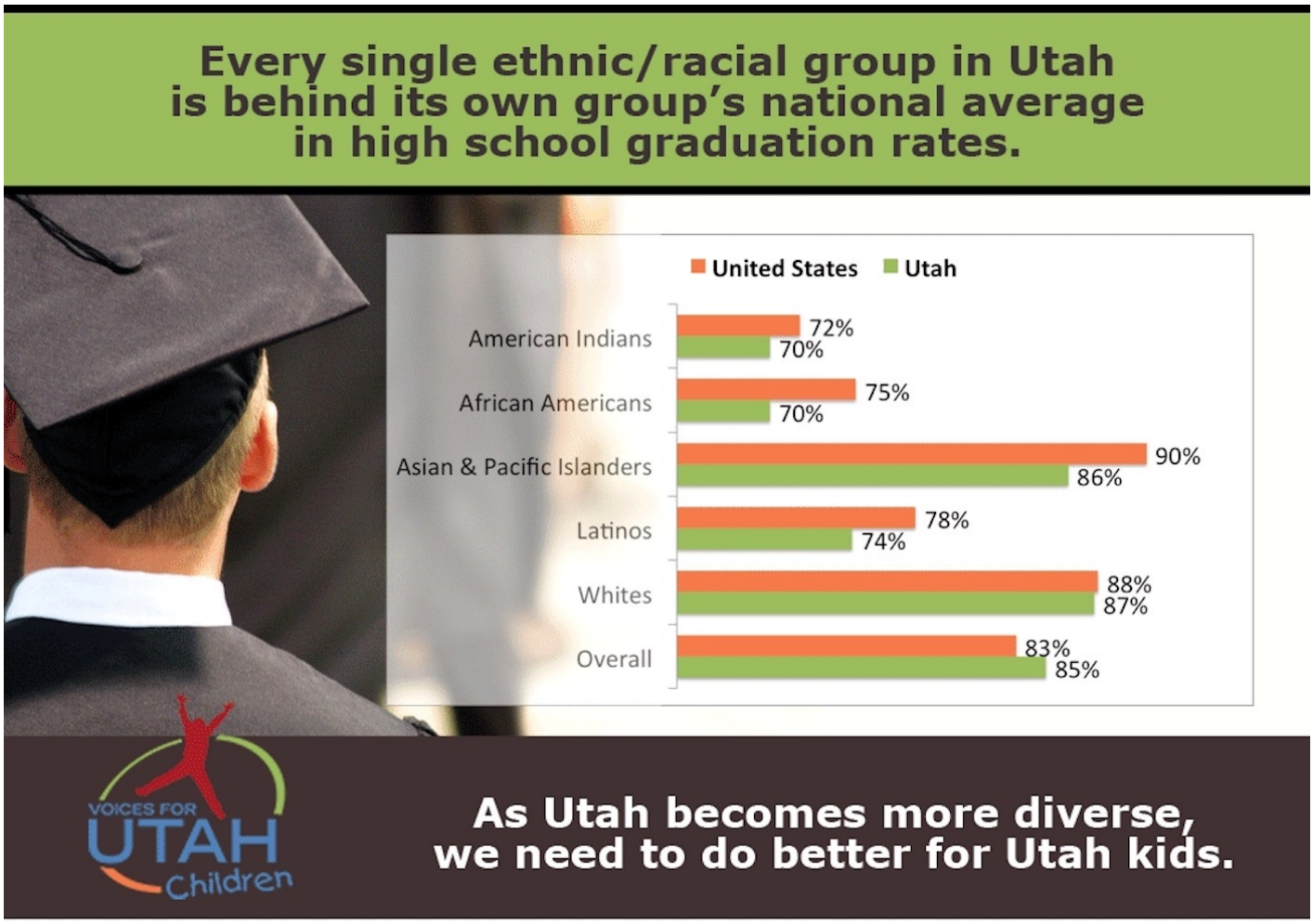
Utah above average – and below average – in new national high school gra

Published: Thursday, 20 October 2016 07:18
Written by: Matthew Weinstein



This week saw the publication of new state and federal data on high school graduation rates for the school year than ended in June 2015. “Utah high school graduation rate above average: 84.8 percent” crowed the headline of the AP coverage carried in many Utah newspapers. But a closer look at the data reveals a more troubling picture.

It is a well-known and highly distressing fact of American life that we suffer from tremendous disparities among our various racial and ethnic groups in many social and economic characteristics, including educational attainment. For the nation as a whole, here are the high school graduation rates trends over the past few years, broken out by race and ethnicity:

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US High School Graduation Rates	2013	2014	2015
US overall	81.4%	82.3%	83.2%
US whites	86.6%	87.2%	87.6%
US Latinos	75.2%	76.3%	77.8%
US Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders	88.7%	89.4%	90.2%
US African Americans	70.7%	72.5%	74.6%
US American Indians	69.7%	69.6%	71.6%

Now here are the equivalent data for Utah:

Utah High School Graduation Rates	2013	2014	2015
Utah overall	83.0%	83.9%	84.8%
Utah whites	86.1%	86.6%	87.4%
Utah Latinos	70.4%	72.9%	74.4%
Utah Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders	80.0%	85.0%	86.0%
Utah African Americans	70.0%	69.0%	70.0%
Utah American Indians	67.0%	66.0%	70.0%

Two things about these data stand out:
1) Utah is ahead of the national average in the overall high school graduation rate. Bravo for us!
2) Every single ethnic/racial group in Utah is behind its own group's national average, including our two largest groups, whites and Hispanics. Huh?

How is it possible that we are ahead of the national average overall but behind within each individual ethnic/racial group? The answer is simple math: we have a higher-than-average share of whites, who have a higher than average high school graduation rate. Utah's population is 79% non-Hispanic white, while the national average is 62%. Thus, the fact that we have a higher share of a group with a higher graduation rate gives us an advantage in the overall high school graduation rate.

But should we be concerned that every racial/ethnic group in Utah is behind the national graduation rates for its own group? We should, for at least two reasons:

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1) Inevitably we have to ask, why has the white population in Utah over the last few years been 0.2-0.6 points behind whites nationally? Could it be that even Utah's highest-in-the-nation level of two-parent families and high levels of parent volunteerism are not enough to overcome the detrimental effects of our lowest-in-the-nation level of per-pupil funding, even among our white population? That would certainly appear to be the case.

2) Our Hispanic minority is growing fast – now reaching 14% of the state's population -- and 17% of our children. This means that Latinos are one-sixth of our future workforce. The fact that their graduation rate is 10 points behind the state average – and 3.4 points behind Latinos nationally – should be cause for very great concern.

These alarming findings come just a few months after Voices for Utah Children reported that Utah has now, for the first time on record, fallen behind the national average for college degrees (Bachelor's degrees and higher among our working-age population ages 25-64). Taken together, these developments should sound a red alert among our state's policymakers.

Sources:
http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2014-15.asp
http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2013-14.asp
http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2012-13.asp

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For 30 years now, Voices for Utah Children has called on our state, federal and local leaders to put children's needs first. But the work is not done. The children of 30 years ago now have children of their own. Too many of these children are growing up in poverty, without access to healthcare or quality educational opportunities.

How can you be involved?

Make a tax-deductible donation to Voices for Utah Children—or join our Network with a monthly donation of $20 or more. Network membership includes complimentary admission to Network events with food, socializing, and opportunity to meet child advocacy experts. And don't forget to join our listserv to stay informed!

We look forward to the future of Voices for Utah Children and we hope you will be a

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part of our next 30 years.

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