

2004 – 2005

Focus On

Hispanics

We must do more to close the achievement gap. We must ensure that every child is learning and succeeding in school, regardless of race, gender, and sexual orientation.—Reg Weaver, President, National Education Association

The National Education Association's commitment to creating great public schools for every child requires working to ensure that all students are learning and succeeding in schools. This task is challenging. From its beginnings, our nation's school system has treated students differently, depending on their race, social class, and gender, and even today, a significant gap in academic achievement persists among groups.

The 2004 - 2005 Focus On series examines and enriches our understanding of this achievement gap for six groups: American Indian and Alaska Native students; Asian and Pacific Islander students; Black students; Hispanic students; women and girls; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students. Each publication highlights some of the barriers to learning and success faced by one of these groups of students, concrete strategies to address these barriers, and additional resources for school personnel.

Today's Hispanic children will be a significant percentage of tomorrow's working adults in little over a decade. The importance of educational performance has never been more important for Hispanic communities, families, and individuals and for the nation as a whole. Major changes in demographics, politics, and the national economy—along with our understanding of those changes—make this issue particularly acute. For example, the results of the 2000 U.S. Census documents the rapid growth of the Hispanic population nationwide; the attainment of plurality or majority status by Hispanics in several major metropolitan areas; and the diffusion of Hispanic populations into parts of the country, particularly the South, that have not been traditional destinations. Telling statistics underscore this demographic shift:

- In 23 of the 50 states, Hispanics now outnumber African Americans and Asians;
- Nationally, Hispanics have surpassed African-Americans in population;
- One in nine Americans is of Hispanic descent, and in some states—like California, Texas, and New Mexico—Hispanics are now one of every two pupils in first grade.

Hispanics have made significant gains in several key education areas in the past twenty years, yet despite these gains, gaps in academic performance between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students remain.¹ Hispanic **enrollment** in col-

leges and universities increased between 1980 and 2003, though a smaller proportion of Hispanics complete college compared to whites, Blacks, and Asians. There are persistent shortcomings across major benchmarks when compared to other groups, thus Hispanic **dropout rates** are the highest and have not declined since 1972.² More than two in five Hispanics have not graduated from high school. As a group, Hispanic individuals aged 25 and older were less likely to have graduated from high school than whites in the same age bracket—57 percent to 88.4 percent, respectively.³ In addition, more than one-quarter of Hispanics (27.3 percent) had less than a ninth grade education compared to white students (4.2 percent). Further, compared to white and Asian students, Hispanic youth who finish high school typically **score lower on SATs** or other standardized measures of performance.⁴ Consequently, Hispanic students will be less likely to immediately transition to college.

Closing the gaps in achievement cannot be done without attending to barriers to learning and succeeding uniquely experienced by various groups of Hispanic students. The sections that follow will propose ways to address these barriers through instruction, curriculum, policy, and community partnerships.

INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

U.S. Census data recently revealed that nearly one out of every four Hispanic children between the ages of 5 and 17 comes from a home in which English is not the primary spoken language.⁵ While not surprising to anyone living or working in an ethnically or linguistically diverse community in the United States, schools that serve a large number of second language learners have found they often do not have a commensurate number of teachers who are skilled in ESL/bilingual techniques. Increasing the *quality* and *quantity* of ESL teachers is absolutely critical to bridging educational gaps for Hispanic students.

The perceptions of others regarding, for example, language, social identity, social status, intellectual abilities, and cultural attitudes—both positive and negative—can affect the



teaching and learning process for ELL students. It is more important than ever to understand that the Hispanic population is very diverse, with each subgroup having a rich and unique culture, history, language, socio-economic status, and immigration history. In a classroom of Hispanic students, for example, a teacher may find students who are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or from Central and South America. Understanding these distinctions is fundamental to understanding the work that must be done to make real progress in closing the various gaps to achievement for Hispanic students.

We know that effective teaching and learning must be processed with many different methodologies and pedagogy. Using best researched instructional practices, educators can draw from Hispanic students' out-of-school experiences in lively ways to infuse and inform their classroom instructional learning experiences. Rather than negating these experiences and the prior knowledge that Hispanic students bring to school with them, educators can use these experiences as building blocks for academic instructional mastery of sophisticated concepts and content. Rather than consigning Hispanic students to low-level drill or outmoded instructional aids, such as worksheets, to keep students occupied, educators can use challenging course content with real-world applications that are associated with students' experiences.

Instructional activities that are designed with cooperative learning strategies have proven to raise motivation and achievement in Hispanic students, especially if those students are English Language Learners. Examples of cooperative learning activities include: Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, Three-Step Interview, and Round Robin Brainstorming. The sheer amount of "seat time" on the part of a student who is engaged in challenging, active, consistent instruction and learning also can maximize a student's academic success.

While not specific to Hispanic students, schools differ widely in the extent to which they effectively manage the instructional school day. Research suggests that school instructional environments that are caring, nurturing, and respectful of students and their culture and language are also places where Hispanic students do well academically.⁶ To foster academic success among Hispanic students, consider using methodologies and strategies that:

- Infuse in all lesson plans the understanding of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and
- Focus instruction on providing students with a larger purpose or meaning for their learning so that there is a bridging of culture, community, school, home to the students' learning (such as inviting the students' families to a culture-sharing event that encourage discussions, writing, and storytelling.)⁷

CURRICULUM STRATEGIES

The overall intellectual rigor of the K-12 curriculum is one of the most consistent predictors of future educational achievement. The connection between challenging curriculum and academic achievement is no different for Hispanic students than for any other group of students. Examples of this are when the teacher:

- Assists students to accomplish more complex understanding by relating to their real-life experience;
- Assures that students, for each instructional topic, see the whole picture as the basis for understanding the parts;
- Presents challenging standards for student performance;
- Gives clear, direct feedback about how student performance compares with the challenging standards;
- Showcases schoolwork, displaying it to students' parents and families and community; and
- Engages students in focused and cohesive oral and written explanations of their work.

More than ever, educators who serve Hispanic students must adhere to researched-based teaching practices and methodologies for linguistic and cultural Hispanic students. To avoid stereotyping, the belief that one curriculum "fits all," teachers and education support staff should be knowledgeable, understanding, and respectful about the culture, history, and language of the various Hispanic students in their school and community. Instructional curriculum should be modified or differentiated so that all students are activity participating and being viewed by their peers as being successful because the teacher has made the learning meaningful.⁸ This must and can be done with sensitivity and respect without lowering the curriculum-instructional standards and benchmarks.

Dr. James Banks is one of the leading scholars in the field of curriculum integration and multicultural education. His research on integration and "The Transformative Approach" changes the basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several Hispanic and other ethnic perspectives and points of view.⁹ The key curriculum approach is more than the addition of a long list of ethnic groups, heroes, and contributions, but the infusion of various perspectives, frames of reference, and content from various groups that will extend students' understandings of the content. Dr. Bank's research shows that curriculum should be developed that goes beyond heroes and holidays to one that is transformative and teaches decisionmaking and social action.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001—the reautho-

rization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965—includes policies that impact Hispanic students in varying ways. Below are several action recommendations, corresponding state legislative actions, and policy recommendations relevant to NCLB policies that promote the academic success of Hispanic students.¹⁰

Effective Learning Time

- Increase the use of effective programs to reduce school dropouts by Hispanic students particularly, making school more challenging and meaningful for students.
- Strive for a standard approach to the computation of dropout statistics.
- Increase the use of effective programs to reduce school absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness of Hispanics. Make this a benchmark measure in the evaluation of schools.

Preschool Educational Experiences

- Increase Hispanic families' awareness of and involvement in community health programs as well as what constitutes a high-quality preschool program.
- Increase the quality and adherence to “best practices,” as well as culturally responsive instructional activities that cater to the needs of Hispanic children and English Language Learners.

Teacher Preparation

- Increase teacher salary levels generally, but also provide more incentives and bonus opportunities to reward exemplary teaching, particularly in low-performing and linguistically diverse schools.
- Increase financial and career incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness, signing bonuses, tuition payments for graduate training) for high-quality teachers (including master teachers and National Board Certified teachers) to work in schools with high percentages of minority and/or lower income students.

Enabling and Energizing the Hispanic Community and Parents

- Dramatically increase the outreach role to Hispanic parents and communities being served by K-12 schools at all levels, as well as by colleges and universities.
- Assist families and communities to become informed, active education “consumers” for themselves and their children.
- Address differing expectations that Hispanic parents may have for their male vs. female children, including the value of attending a top-ranked college away from home.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A critical factor affecting Hispanic student achievement is the level of parental and community involvement. Schools and districts should consider exploring new roles for school staff, parents, and community members to facilitate Hispanic student learning. There are a number of ways to stay in touch with parents and the community. First, to make communication practical and “user friendly,” arrange to have all materials going home with the student or out to the community translated into Spanish. Make a serious effort to hire staff who can speak Spanish in various settings. And research has shown that classes for parents on practical topics such as computers and nutrition yield proactive, involved parents who participate in their students' education.

In *Transforming Teaching for Hispanic Students*, the Hispanic Dropout Project reported that exemplary sites relied upon imaginative strategies to draw Hispanic parents and families into school life.¹¹ For example, rather than expecting Hispanic families to conform to the conventional schedule of evening PTA meetings, these schools offered parent potlucks at the dinner hour or immediately after school to accommodate parents who worked two jobs or the night shift. Alternatively, they maintained a parent room within the school where parents felt welcome to drop in during the day and visit their child's class. At such sites, staff succeeded in making school an extension of Hispanic families' daily lives and, as a result, contributed to an overall positive relationship between home and school.

Exemplary schools also utilized their bilingual staff as team members to make home visits. These visits are planned carefully so that they are not seen as punitive, but as affirmations of the student's value to the school. Staff at one school, for example, demonstrated the importance of having the child read aloud to the parent at home, whether or not the parent was fluent in English. This emphasis on engaging the family member into the school's strategy to build literacy gave parents something concrete and manageable they could do to help their children gain literacy—regardless of their English language.

CONCLUSION

All children tend to be naturally curious, engaged with their environment, and motivated and excited about learning. With early parenting support and encouragement, cognitive enrichment, and healthy home and very supportive school environments, all Hispanic students can be successful in their academic and social achievement. Provided with teachers who have high expectations and who understand that the Hispanic culture and language are critical to learning, nearly all Hispanic students will be academically successful and will want a college education. But before that can happen, they—like all students—need equal access to substantive knowledge, appropriate instruction, and caring guidance to get there.

HISPANICS

Notes

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2003), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003008.pdf>

2. National Center for Educational Statistics, *The Condition of Education in Brief*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2002). <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004076>

3. U.S. Census Bureau 2000, *The Hispanic Population in the United States: Population Characteristics*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hispanic/p20-535/p20-535.pdf

4. Patricia Gándara with Julie Maxwell-Jolly, *Priming the Pump: Strategies for Increasing the Achievement of Underrepresented Minority Undergraduates*, (New York, NY: The College Board, 1999). www.collegeboard.com/repository/primingthep_3949.pdf

5. Charles Ahern et al., *The Diversity Kit: An Introductory Resource for Social Change in Education LAB at Brown University*, (Providence, R.I.: The Education Alliance, 2002). www.lab.brown.edu/tld/diversitykitpdfs/diversitykit.pdf

6. Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood and Walter G. Secada, *Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth: Exemplary Practices, Programs, and Schools*, (Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1999). www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/hispanicyouth/hdp.htm

7. <http://edtech/cooperativelearning.htm#activities>

8. Ana Maria Villegas, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for the 1990s and Beyond*, (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1991).

9. James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1994).

10. Louis G. Tornatzky, Harry P. Pachon, and Celina Torres, *Closing Achievement Gaps: Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic/Latino Children*, Report to the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, (Los Angeles, CA: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2003).

11. Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood, *Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth: Recommendations for Teachers and Program Staff*, Issue Brief, (Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2000). www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/issuebriefs/ib3.htm

NEA Resources

C.A.R.E.: *Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps*

Published by NEA Human and Civil Rights, C.A.R.E.: *Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps* offers research-based activities to engage poor and/or culturally and linguistically diverse students by building on their culture, unidentified abilities, resilience, and untapped effort. For more information, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, (202) 822-7700, hcrinfo@nea.org.

KEYS for School Success in Spanish

KEYS, which stands for Key to Excellence for Your Schools, is an initiative that can help every school develop the capacity to become a quality school. The key is how a school goes about organizing itself for teaching and learning. The initiative centers on 42 indicators clustered within 6 “keys” that research have found predicts higher student achievement. A survey tool and other materials, now available in Spanish, lets schools measure for themselves the extent to which the quality indicators are present. For more, visit KEYS online at www.keysonline.org/ and click “Spanish,” or contact Ruben Cedeño, rcedeno@nea.org, (202) 822-7361.

Bilingual Reading List

NEA’s Read Across America offers a bilingual reading list of titles appropriate for K-12 students. The list, compiled by Association staff, also includes books that have both Spanish and English editions and includes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry lists by grade level. www.nea.org/readacross/resources/bilingualbooks.html.

Additional Resources

Cites to these Web sites are provided for informational purposes only, and their listing here does not constitute NEA endorsement of the resources offered, activities promoted, or other content included on these Web sites.

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), 1030 15th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20005, (202) 898-1829, www.nabe.org

The National Council of La Raza, 1111 19th Street, N.W., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 785-1670, www.nclr.org

PEW Hispanic Center, 1919 M Street N.W., Suite 460, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 292-3300, www.pewhispanic.org



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