

# THE STATUS OF EDUCATION FOR HISPANICS

RAMÓN L. SANTIAGO AND  
ROSA CASTRO FEINBERG

Educational and economic indicators do not paint an optimistic picture of the conditions of Hispanics in the United States. Three years ago, one-fifth of all Hispanic families had incomes below the poverty level, as compared with 9 percent of non-Hispanic families. In 1976, Hispanics aged 14-19 were twice as likely as whites not to complete high school, and at the elementary level about two-thirds were attending schools composed primarily of minority students. Of those who entered college in 1972, over half did not graduate.

In this article we will identify areas of progress and unresolved problems in achieving educational equity for Hispanic students. The information summarized here is based on two sources: the Executive Reports from three of the five Regional Conferences on the Education of Hispanics held in 1980 under the auspices of the Office of Hispanic Concerns and other Department of Education agencies, and presentations delivered at the Conference for the Midwest Region, where all Hispanic subgroups were represented. Each section concludes with a review of recommendations from the Regional Conferences. Unless otherwise noted, statistical data are from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Brown and others, 1980).

*Ramón L. Santiago is Director of the Georgetown University Bilingual Education Service Center, Washington, D.C.; and Rosa Castro Feinberg is Associate Director of the University of Miami National Origin Desegregation Assistance Center, Coral Gables, Florida.*

## Elementary and Secondary Education

Over 3 million Hispanic children, or 6 percent of the total mainland public school population, are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. Roughly a third of these children attend schools in which minority students comprise 90 to 100 percent of the total enrollment, and another third attend schools where the percentage of minority students is between 50 and 89 percent. Such segregation of Hispanic students is more marked in the Northeast but is increasing rapidly in the Midwest as well.

Enrollment figures reveal that 57 percent of the three- to six-year-old Hispanic children are in school, compared with 65 percent of whites. Among 8- to 13-year-olds, approximately 10 percent of Hispanic children are below grade level—double the rate for white, non-Hispanic children. This same ratio persists among the 14- to 20-year-olds, 25 percent of whom are not at the expected grade levels. In this older age group increased disadvantage is noted for the four out of five who live in households where Spanish is spoken.

In assessments conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old Hispanic students were significantly below the national average in social studies, science, mathematics, career and occupational development, and reading. Moreover, as they got older their achievement in math, science, and social studies decreased, though recent studies have noted a small but statistically significant improvement by 17-year-olds in science.

The National Center for Educational Statistics concluded, in a national longitudinal study of high school seniors begun in 1972, that Hispanic seniors generally receive lower grades than their white classmates, and that Hispanics participate less in extracurricular activities (with the exception of vocational clubs).

For Hispanics, the dropout rate has historically and consistently been higher than for non-Hispanics. In 1972, 16 percent of Hispanics aged 14 through 19 were out of school though not graduated, compared with 8 percent of the corresponding white group. By 1978, the figures had increased to 19 percent for Hispanics and 9 percent for whites.

## Special Education

Although NCES data do not support the conclusion, there is a widespread perception among Hispanic educators that Spanish-speaking children are overrepresented in special education classes, due to linguistically and culturally biased assessment procedures. The same inadequate instruments are also used to determine placement in programs for the gifted and talented, which may account for the documented underrepresentation of Hispanics in such programs.

The belief also exists that Hispanic exceptional children with limited-English proficiency may be inadequately served. The education these children receive cannot be considered appropriate if it is not delivered in a language they can understand. As an example, children properly placed in classes for the mentally retarded often receive no benefit from such placement because Spanish-speaking



**A recent series of conferences on equity for Hispanic students reviewed some dismal statistics and produced recommendations to educators.**

instructional staff are not available.

*Recommendations:* 1. Part B funds allocated under PL 94-142, section 167, should be monitored to determine if they are being used to provide appropriate instruction in the appropriate language to limited-English proficiency Hispanic students.

2. In making placement decisions for Hispanics, consideration must be given to cultural and linguistic factors. Intelligence tests in current use are not constructed with regard for the experiences of Hispanic children and do not include such children in the norming groups. Educators must demand of test publishers greater content validity and more informative data in technical manuals.

#### **Bilingual Education**

There are 28 million persons of limited-English proficiency in this country, 3.6 million of whom are of school age (Pifer, 1979). Hispanics are the largest part of this group and still growing, and 80 percent live in households where Spanish is the primary language of communication. For this population the promise of a special kind of education was an appealing vision, and a series of events seemed to turn that vision into a reality.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act forbade discrimination on the basis of national origin characteristics such as language. Ten years later, in 1974, the Supreme Court through the Lau decision required local school districts to provide limited-English-speaking students access to a meaningful (understandable) education. In between, federal funding for bilingual education programs was made available through Title VII of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 1968. Since then approximately 20 states have enacted Bilingual Education Acts which require, permit, and occasionally fund such programs.

Nevertheless, even in states with the largest concentrations of limited-English-speaking students, the number of identified students served has not reached two-thirds. No state provides bilingual/bicultural programs for all its target children, and the programs that exist, more often than not, developed as remedial programs within the constraints of a deficit model. Thus the benefits of maintenance bilingual education, which

recognizes the value of instruction in two languages throughout a student's school career, and of enrichment bilingual education, which recognizes that bilingualism is valuable not only for minority children but also for majority students, have not been properly exploited.

**Recommendations:** 1. Educators should demand vigorous enforcement from the Office of Civil Rights and intensive participation from parents in the formulation of compliance plans.

2. Public information programs should be devised which more adequately represent the nature and advantages of bilingual education to the general public.

3. Planned variation studies should be implemented which will permit the development and analysis of models of bilingual/bicultural education.

### **Migrant Education**

There are approximately a million migrant children in the nation's schools; 80 percent of them are Hispanics (Soriano, 1980). The majority of these students live in Spanish-speaking households where the average salary is less than \$3,000 a year. This group, which has the highest dropout rate, is finding it increasingly difficult to graduate from high school because of minimum competency testing programs. In Florida, for example, only 29 percent of the migrant students passed the minimum competency requirements in 1977, compared with 64 percent of all other students (Soriano, 1980). The central problem in migrant education is arranging for continuity in schooling in the face of high mobility of migrant students and families.

**Recommendations:** 1. Instructional techniques, curriculum materials, measurement procedures and instruments, and school schedules must be restructured and redirected so that learning can take place in small but visible increments.

2. Teachers need assistance in using the Migrant Student Records Transfer System (MSRTS) so that interstate and interdistrict communication can serve as a base for local curriculum development.

3. High school credit exchange systems such as the one developed by Texas and Washington State should be extended to other areas within the migrant stream.

### **Parent Involvement**

Educational equity for Hispanic students is a function of active cooperation between Hispanics and school communities. Schools need access to the resources of parents and parent groups. Unfortunately, present parent involvement structures, such as the Parent Teacher Association, are perceived as alien and inhospitable by Hispanic parents due to differences in language, culture, and perceptions of the role of parents, teachers, and the school system. The school then assumes that Hispanic parents do not care about the education of their children, and the Hispanic children miss out on the benefits of a vigorous and positive relationship between the home and the school.



**Recommendations:** 1. Courses in civic responsibility for parents should be provided as part of an overall training plan in community education to show Hispanic parents how to become agents of change.

2. Training on issues and concerns central to the effective functioning of Parent Advisory Councils should be offered.

3. Districts should allocate resources for such training, including funds for the selection of bilingual staff members.

4. Districts should conduct person-to-person outreach efforts to convince parents that their potential contributions as effective partners in the educational process of their children are both needed and valued.

### **Post-Secondary Education**

Progress in post-secondary education is crucial for Hispanics. In 1978, the approximately 5 million Hispanics in the U.S. labor force were underrepresented in the professional, technical, managerial, and salesworker categories. Almost half of the Hispanics held blue-collar jobs and one-third white-collar jobs. The figures were exactly reversed for non-Hispanic workers. Finally, the unemployment rate for Hispanics was almost twice that of non-Hispanics.

Efforts at educational improvement have had mixed results. Twenty-four percent of Hispanics lack a high school diploma, and one fifth of the total participants in federally-funded adult basic educational programs are Hispanics. Only 5 percent of those enrolled in vocational programs are of Hispanic origin, and even then many are forced to withdraw from these programs because of financial difficulties.

At the higher education level, Hispanics have increased their enrollment at institutions of higher education (IHEs), but this increase has been reflected primarily in two-year colleges and in 16 institutions in California, Texas, Florida, and New Mexico (which, along with 34 other IHEs in Puerto Rico account for 43 percent of all Hispanic college enrollments). Four mainland institutions with bilingual curricula and Hispanic leadership were established specifically to serve Hispanic clients: Boricua College, Colegio César Chávez, DQ University, and CUNY's Hostos Community College.

Hispanic college enrollment has been on the increase since 1970; in fact, it has nearly doubled at the undergraduate level (from 98,453 to 196,451) as well as at the graduate and professional school levels. Even so, the outlook is not optimistic. Over half of the Hispanic students in college fail to earn a bachelor's degree, and at the graduate level they are less likely than non-Hispanics to earn degrees in business and management. Hispanics are still underrepresented in undergraduate, graduate, and professional education; while they comprise nearly 7 percent of the country's total population, they constitute only 3.5 percent of all undergraduate students and 2.2 percent of all graduate students.

## Adult and Vocational Education

Hispanics are underrepresented in adult and vocational education programs as students and as administrators, members of advisory councils, and as staff members in school districts and state department agencies. The lack of Hispanic role models and bilingual counselors, coupled with stringent academic and linguistic prerequisites for program participation, further limits the utility of these programs for Hispanic students. In addition, even those limited-English speakers who participate in bilingual programs are denied the possibility of participation in career- or vocationally-oriented programs because of poor programmatic coordination. Only a handful of bilingual vocational or adult programs have been established, and additional exclusion results because many of the students who are interested in participating have family responsibilities and cannot afford to leave their jobs to meet the demands of these training programs.

*Recommendations:* 1. Extensive recruitment and career counseling efforts should be initiated which utilize community resources and channels of communication, particularly when trying to reach out-of-school youths and adults.

2. Inservice training programs should be provided to bilingual and migrant program staff members to bring about greater coordination between those programs, and to ensure that career education is part of all curricula.

3. Preservice programs for the preparation of personnel for bilingual vocational education are badly needed.

4. Linguistically and culturally sound career counseling and training materials should be made available.

## Higher Education

Hispanics are not fairly represented as students and staff members at IHEs. Where they do participate, they are most often found either as students in less prestigious two-year colleges, commuter colleges, and outreach facilities not on the main campus; or as junior faculty or staff in non-tenure track positions. Hispanic student attendance at less prestigious colleges denies them the opportunity for upward mobility normally associated with IHEs attended by non-

Hispanic students. Hispanics are also deprived of the benefit of Hispanic role models in key positions within IHE settings.

Greater access to counseling in the areas of health, social service, and financial aid would occur if Hispanic staff members were available in these areas to provide linguistically and culturally compatible services, and to exert their influence in reformulating the potentially exclusionary policies and practices of IHE's.

Over half of the Hispanics who drop out of college do so for financial reasons; yet Hispanics typically re-



ceive smaller than average grant awards and are underrepresented in student loan and work-study programs. They have greater need for financial assistance than the population at large but receive less financial assistance (Lucas, 1980).

There is widespread recognition of increasing need for bilingual/bicultural education programs at the college level, and of the lack of appropriate materials available for such programs. The need for Spanish language testing instruments is particularly acute. Such instruments are needed at all levels of instruction, along with assurances of appropriate content and representative norming groups. Similarly, the need for Hispanic leadership in all fields, coupled with Hispanic professionals in this country who are presently unemployed or underemployed, points to the advisability of a national system for validating foreign degrees and credentials.

*Recommendations:* 1. Vigorous recruitment efforts designed to attract Hispanics as students, faculty members, administrators, and counselors should be instituted.

2. Affirmative action guidelines should be enforced.

3. Public program reviews of financial aid policies and allocations should be established.

4. Curriculums should be modified to be more relevant to the needs of Hispanic students, especially with regard to bilingual and ESL programs.

5. Curriculum materials and evaluation instruments for the above programs should be developed.

6. A national task force to develop policies and procedures leading to the validation of foreign degrees and credentials should be created.

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## Teacher Training Programs

As critical as the problem of adequate representation of Hispanics might be at the student level, it is certainly no better among professional educators. More Hispanic professionals are needed everywhere, but the most acute need is for bilingual education and special education specialists, bilingual/bicultural administrators, counselors, and parent involvement experts.

In many parts of the country, teacher training programs for prospective bilingual teachers are not

staffed with persons who have mastery of Spanish or insight into the dynamics of Hispanic culture. Faculty members with these limitations cannot provide appropriate instruction to future teachers of academic content who in turn hope to transmit this content through the Spanish language to children from Hispanic households.

*Recommendations:* 1. Specialized recruitment practices should be instituted to rectify inequitable levels of Hispanic employment in public school systems.

2. Programs designed to prepare bilingual/bicultural teachers of handicapped and gifted students should be initiated or expanded.

3. Appropriate linguistic and cultural criteria should be applied when selecting faculty for bilingual teacher training programs.

4. Stringent evaluation of teacher training programs for bilingual educators should be carried out, and the results made available for public review.

Unquestionably, Hispanics in the U.S. have little cause to rejoice about matters of educational equity, and the future is at best uncertain, as suggested by the October 1976 report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

To be sure, there are bright spots on the horizon. The University of Colorado at Denver has been chosen to oversee a \$2.5 million federally-funded program to recruit and educate 150 Hispanic graduate students, in an effort to increase the participation of Hispanics in public service careers at the local government level (*Rocky Mountain News*, 1980). The newspaper report called it "a good, a positive program," and indicated that it was "the only program of its kind that deals with underrepresentation through the educational process." On the job-related front, the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently promulgated guidelines "which emphasize and clarify the right of bilingual individuals to speak a language other than English in the workplace" and which also "bar harassment, such as ethnic slurs, on the job."

There is still a long way to go. Although it is forecast that by 1990 Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the schools (if not in the

whole of American society), there is little indication that the collective lot of Hispanics will improve substantially with time. As one conference presenter pointed out, there is currently no national center which can ascertain and make public the condition of Hispanics in order to formulate beneficial public policies. More important, recent adverse reaction to the Cuban immigrants, coupled with the constant preoccupation over the Mexican undocumented aliens, suggests that any improvement in the condition of Hispanics in the U.S. will depend to a great extent on a change in the attitude of the American public toward Hispanics.

Ultimately, it is important to realize that the need to gain educational equity for Hispanics is not the concern of educators and the educational establishment alone; unequal access to educational opportunity and to the benefits normally associated with a "decent" education results in more than just economic and social status problems. The latest monograph from the Hispanic Research Center at Fordham University (Canino and others, 1980) suggests that severely disadvantaged minority groups are "susceptible to a series of stressful life-events" that can lead to mental health problems. The study found that Puerto Rican children, who share many of the characteristics of the Hispanics described in this article, "experience a greater array of stress-inducing events than other children and thus, they are at higher risk to mental health problems" (p. 93). Significantly, for such children the school and the family "may themselves become sources of stress for the child and lose their value as social support networks" (p. 94).

We hope that educators who play a role in the education of Hispanics now and in the future will look upon Hispanics as a growing group deserving of their best professional and human efforts, and that a status report at the end of the next decade will offer more occasion for celebration than the present one. ■

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