

From Diverse Online

Noteworthy News  
Education Gaps Among U.S. Hispanics  
By David Pluviose  
Mar 23, 2006, 14:20

### **Education Gaps Among U.S. Hispanics Stagnating Economic Progress**

Study shows Hispanics more likely to attend two-year colleges, but less likely than other ethnic groups to transfer to a four-year institution

By David Pluviose

WASHINGTON

A report released earlier this month by the National Academies' National Research Council finds that education and training are key to giving America's Hispanic workers and their children the tools necessary to participate in the country's future. The report, titled "Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future," is a thorough examination of Hispanic life in the United States, covering economic, health, education and other issues.



Dr. Marta Tienda

Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States, and their numbers are growing. Hispanics currently represent 14 percent of the U.S. population, a figure that is expected to grow to 25 percent within 20 years. The population is also young — the median age is 27, versus 39 for non-Hispanic Whites.

Many Hispanics, especially immigrants, remain at the bottom of the economic ladder in low-paying service jobs — mainly due to a lack of formal schooling and English proficiency, the report finds. Also, both native- and foreign-born Hispanics are less likely than their non-Hispanic counterparts to finish high school. Approximately 40 percent of Hispanic high school students attend impoverished inner-city schools that graduate less than 60 percent of their incoming freshmen.

Dr. Marta Tienda, the chair of the NRC panel, says Hispanic children aren't being pushed towards college during their middle school years. By the time the students reach high school, many are too far behind academically to make college a realistic option. And others, she says, don't feel the need to attend college because none of their classmates are. According to the report, a recent study found that 37 percent of Asian American eighth-graders planned to enroll in a college preparatory curriculum in high school. About 31 percent of White and 25 percent of Black eighth-graders also had college prep aspirations. But that number dropped to 23 percent for Hispanic students.

Tienda, who is also the Maurice P. Daring Professor in demographic studies and a professor of sociology and public affairs at Princeton University, says teachers and counselors hold a powerful influence over children during those middle school years. Instilling the need for college in students at that age is likely to impact their high school goals, she says.

“I was fortunate. I had a seventh-grade teacher who put college on my radar screen. It made a difference,” she says. “That is so critical [and] we’re not doing it. School climate makes such a difference.”

The low numbers of Hispanics on the college prep track in high school is at odds with a Public Agenda survey that found that 65 percent of Hispanic parents believe that a college education is the single most important factor for economic success. Forty-seven percent of Black parents and 33 percent of White parents shared that opinion. The report found that Hispanics lag behind other ethnic groups when it comes to obtaining four-year college degrees for several reasons, including limited home educational resources, a disproportional student concentration in scholastically weak high schools and a lack of concrete information about how to prepare for college.

Though Hispanic college enrollment is on the upswing, those numbers also lag behind their White counterparts, the report finds. In 2000, Hispanics made up 11 percent of U.S. high school graduates but only 7 percent of four-year college students. However, Hispanics accounted for 14 percent of enrollees in two-year colleges, and are more likely to attend two-year colleges than Whites, the report says.

“What’s a tragedy about that is that two-year college-goers are much less likely to make the transition to four-year,” says Tienda.

According to the report, Hispanic community college students generally do intend to transfer to four-year colleges. But compared to other ethnic groups, they are the least likely to actually do so. And the Hispanic students who do go to four-year colleges are less likely to receive bachelor’s degrees than other ethnic groups. However, Hispanic students who attend highly selective colleges appear immune to the trend. The report also suggests that cost could be a prohibitive factor.

“Access and cost, I think, would explain a lot of it,” says NRC panelist Dr. Stephen Trejo, an associate professor of economics at the University of Texas at Austin.

“Two-year colleges are close to being free in most places and four-year colleges are a lot more expensive. ... It’s location, too. Among Hispanic kids, there’s a tendency for cost reasons and maybe for family reasons to not want to move away for a college that’s far. Two-year colleges tend to be local, whereas four-year colleges aren’t always local,” he says.

Tienda says cost is often the final obstacle that keeps Hispanic students from attending college.

“Hispanics have a higher proportion of first-generation college-goers because of their parents’ average educational attainment, and have a greater risk aversion to taking on more debt,” she says.

This study on Hispanics in the United States was sponsored by a number of government and philanthropic agencies, including the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The National Academies’ Congressionally chartered mission is to advise the federal government on scientific and technology matters.

© Copyright 2005 by [DiverseEducation.com](http://DiverseEducation.com)