



Early Childhood Education for Hispanics in the United States

Hispanic children make up the largest and most rapidly growing racial/ethnic minority population in early education (birth through age eight) in the United States. They also continue to do much less well academically than non-Hispanic Whites and Asian Americans. Consequently, the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics believes that it is imperative that a much better understanding be gained about how these children fare academically compared to their peers from other racial/ethnic groups and about what programs, practices, and policies are more likely to support their educational advancement.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Demographic Information

- Between 1960 and 2002, the Hispanic population in the United States multiplied over five-fold, growing from 7 to 37 million, to over 13 percent of the U.S. population.
- Hispanic children now constitute about 30 percent of poor children under age five.
- Hispanic children represent nearly 18 percent of the school- and preschool-age (4-19-year-old) population in the nation. In July 2003, Hispanic children under age five constituted over 4 million, or 21 percent, of the U.S. population in this age group.
- Hispanic families in the U.S. have traditionally been concentrated in six states, CA, NY, TX, FL, NJ, and IL. But, over the past 10-15 years, Hispanics have been spreading across the middle of the country, mostly in the Rocky Mountain, Midwest, and Southeastern states. Arkansas and North Carolina have had the largest proportional Hispanic growth since the late 1990s, 394 and 337 percent, respectively.
- Three-in-four young Hispanic children are exposed to Spanish in the home.
- Many Hispanics have high levels of family support, networking, and cohesion. These familial strengths may help improve physical and mental health and education outcomes, while helping to reduce some of the adverse consequences of poverty.

Immigration

- One in five of the school-age population (5-19-year-olds) in the U.S. is from an immigrant family (a family in which at least one parent is foreign-born).
- Children of immigrants are more likely to live in poverty; 1 in 4 U.S. children that live below the national poverty line are from immigrant families.
- Since 1980, at least 75 percent of the Hispanic population growth in the U.S. has been due to immigration, either by direct migration or by children born to immigrants. Most of these children are American citizens; 93 percent of all children of immigrants under age six are U.S.-born. In 2000, 62 percent of children in immigrant families were of Latin American heritage.
- Children in Hispanic immigrant families have parents with less formal education, have less access to public programs (i.e., welfare), are less likely to attend a prekindergarten program, are more likely to live in crowded housing, be behind a grade in school, and experience home-school language disparities.
- Compared to U.S.-born Hispanic families, immigrant Hispanic families, on average, have lower infant mortality rates, have fewer health problems, and are more likely to have a two-parent household.

- In 2000, 68 percent of all Hispanics ages 0-8 were of Mexican origin.

Access to Pre-kindergarten Programs

- Prekindergarten programs (private pre-school, Head Start, and state-funded pre-kindergarten) have a positive impact on the school careers of children. Children from low-income families benefit the most. But, all SES segments benefit as well.
- Hispanics are less likely than Blacks and Whites to attend a pre-K program.
- Children in immigrant families are least likely to attend pre-K/Head Start programs.
- For the Hispanic community, financial, linguistic, and educational barriers account for a substantial share of the pre-kindergarten enrollment gap.
- The availability of geographically proximate preschool programs and their availability via public school systems are associated with higher rates of Hispanic families sending their children to preschool at an earlier age.

K-3 Academic Achievement

- Socioeconomic status (SES) is the strongest predictor of academic achievement at the starting gate and throughout K-3 schooling. In 1998, 39 percent of Hispanics and 9 percent of whites were in the lowest SES quintile.
- Compared to their non-Hispanic White and Asian peers, Hispanic kindergartners from the 1998-1999 school year entered kindergarten with significantly less competence at all levels of mathematics and reading, controlling for SES.
- Analyses of academic achievement gaps by race/ethnicity and SES suggest that processes outside of school (e.g., home educational practices), within schools, and between schools contribute to these achievement differences.
- Mathematics and reading academic achievement gaps by race/ethnicity within SES quintiles persist throughout K-3 schooling.
- Hispanic third-graders scored well below their Asian and White peers in science.
- Children of Mexican and Central American heritage scored lower in reading and in mathematics in the K-3 years than children of other Hispanic national origins.
- Among Hispanic third graders, those of Mexican origin scored the lowest in math and reading. Generational and language status play an important role in this pattern, i.e., high percentages of Mexican children are first and second generation as well as English language learners (ELLs).

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- The federal government and foundations should make much larger long-term investments to develop pre-K, K-3, and infant/toddler language and literacy development strategies that are more effective in raising achievement of Hispanics from several SES and national origin subpopulations and for Hispanic ELLs.
- State governments should continue to expand the availability of high quality pre-K, including availability for Hispanics with universal pre-K as a goal.
- State governments should increase the number of Spanish-competent teachers.
- State government should increase the number of language development specialists who can support complex language development among Hispanic (and other) ELLs.
- Meaningful efforts to include parents in early education should be expanded.



(Para Nuestros Niños, May 30, 2006. Visit our Website at www.ecehispanic.org)