



Para nuestros niños

National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

La Comisión Nacional para la Educación de la Niñez Hispana

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CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH PREPARING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS OF HISPANIC STUDENTS

An extensive body of research has found clear benefits for children who attended high-quality prekindergarten programs. In the case of the best model programs for which participants (and those in control groups) have been followed into adulthood, these benefits include improvements in intellectual functioning, reduced grade retention and placement in special education, gains in academic achievement, lower dropout and delinquency rates, higher levels of educational attainment, improved social adjustment and family stability, greater employment stability, higher income, and reduced criminality.

Research has found that several factors are likely to influence the quality of prekindergarten programs. One such factor is the education and training of prekindergarten educators. This update describes the different requirements in formal education and training for educators in the different types of prekindergarten programs and the preparation of aspiring teachers for the rapidly growing and diverse Hispanic student population.

The prekindergarten enterprise is composed of the following types of programs: federally funded Head Start, state funded Prekindergarten, and privately operated for and non-profit programs. The educational requirements for teachers in these prekindergarten settings vary considerably. Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) programs typically require the most formal education, followed by other state-funded prekindergarten initiatives, Head Start, and private centers, which require the least amount of education.

A growing majority of state-funded UPK programs require at least a B.A. degree to be a lead teacher particularly in the public school setting. On the other hand, just over a third of other state-funded initiatives require a B.A. degree of their teaching force. Moreover, in response to the 1998 law requiring 50% of Head Start teachers to obtain at least an associate's degrees by 2002, the credentials of these teachers improved so that by 2003, over a quarter had a B.A. degree. The situation is generally much less demanding in the private sector, as most states do not require teachers in private ECE centers to have any type of training beyond a high school diploma. Some pre-service training is required of private-sector early educators in eighteen states, but only four of these (California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont) require that a college or university provide this training. On average, privately employed ECE teachers are required to undergo just over 13 hours of training annually, but this number varies nationally from zero to thirty hours.

Another important variable in early education is the cultural and linguistic competency that future teachers obtain from their coursework in teacher programs. This

is particularly important given the changing demographics that place Hispanics as the largest and fastest growing ethnic/racial minority group in the U.S. A significant number of these Hispanic youngsters live in homes where Spanish predominates.

Research suggests that to better prepare culturally and linguistically diverse children, their teachers should have competency in the student's native language, learn and respect the students' cultural backgrounds and aim to have meaningful parental involvement with schools. The reality is that administrators from around the country in all types of prekindergarten programs have reported that the most pressing challenges in serving Hispanic children are the lack of sufficient training of early childhood teachers and the lack of bilingual staff. A comprehensive study of early childhood education programs conducted by the Erikson Institute found that the majority of universities require one or no-units of coursework specifically about diversity. Only 3% of universities require their student teachers to be placed in a diverse setting, and only 20% of future teachers have a foreign language requirement.

At a time when the B.A degree or higher is becoming the requirement for early childhood educators, it is important to remain focused on the necessary skills that teachers of young children must know to be effective teachers. High-quality early childhood education for Hispanic children and their families requires teachers who are responsive to the language and cultural backgrounds of children.

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