

Para nuestros niños

Expanding and Improving Early Education for Hispanics
Executive Report

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National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

La Comisión Nacional para la Educación de la Niñez Hispana

National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

Staff

L. Scott Miller
Executive Director

Amara Scott Andrews
Director of Strategic Communications

Delis Cuéllar
Research Associate

Bryant Jensen
Research Associate

Consultants

Margie K. Shields
Editor

Pauline A. Hall
Graphic Designer

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*“If our American way of life
fails the child, it fails us all.”*

Pearl S. Buck

Summary

Raising Hispanic achievement is one of the most important educational priorities for the nation. To maintain a strong economy and be competitive internationally, we need all our nation's children to be prepared to participate fully in today's technology-based society. Yet, despite some progress, academic outcomes for Hispanic children remain low. We can—and must—do more to accelerate the rate of their educational progress in the years and decades ahead. Thus, the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics was established in 2004 to study the challenges to academic achievement for Hispanic children and to develop recommendations to expand and improve their educational opportunities during the period from birth through age eight.

Low academic achievement patterns of Hispanic students are well established by the end of the primary grades. As part of its work, the Task Force commissioned a study to analyze data from a large national sample of children from kindergarten through fifth grade. The study found that, despite extensive efforts since the mid-1980s to raise their academic achievement, Hispanic students continue to achieve at much lower levels than Whites across the K-5 years. Principal findings of the study include the following:

- Hispanic children started kindergarten well behind White youngsters on measures of reading and math skills;
- Although they gained some ground over the K-5 years, Hispanic children were still well behind in reading and math at the end of the fifth grade; and
- Achievement differences between Hispanics and Whites across the K-5 years were closely associated with differences in social class.

The most promising opportunities for raising Hispanic achievement are in the early childhood years. Research indicates that programs at the infant/toddler, prekindergarten, and early elementary levels can help reduce the academic achievement gap between Hispanic and White children. But much more must be done to ensure that the most disadvantaged Hispanic children have access to these programs, and that the programs are designed and staffed in ways best-suited to meeting their needs.

Actions by the public and private sectors are needed to bring about change. The Task Force makes several recommendations to state governments and the federal government, as well as private foundations, Hispanic organizations, and education researchers, outlining the actions needed to expand and improve educational opportunities for young Hispanic children. Recommendations focus on:

- Increasing Hispanic children's access to infant/toddler programs, prekindergarten programs, and summer programs during the early elementary years, giving high priority to Hispanic children from low socioeconomic circumstances, especially those who are English language learners in immigrant families;
- Increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists; and
- Increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate infant/toddler, prekindergarten, and early elementary school language and literacy development strategies for low socioeconomic Hispanics from Spanish-speaking homes.

Introduction

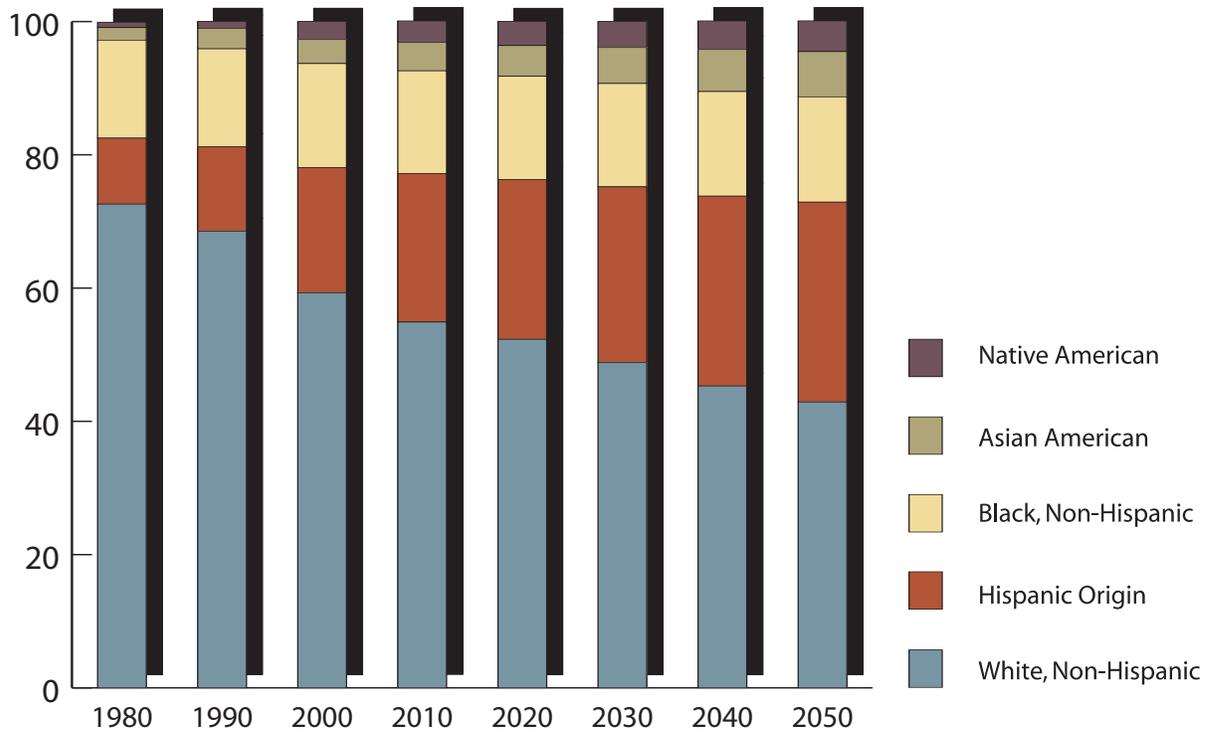
The mission of the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics is straightforward: to develop recommendations for expanding and improving early education for Hispanic children. This mission is important for several reasons. The Hispanic population is large and growing rapidly. Closing the “achievement gap” between Hispanic and White children is essential for the full participation of Hispanics in all sectors of our technology-based society. Also, closing this gap is crucial for the long-term economic health of the nation. Moreover, some of the most promising approaches to raising achievement are in the early childhood years, during the period from birth through age eight. A final reason, though less frequently cited, is also worth emphasizing: Our society not only has an enormous opportunity to make meaningful progress in improving academic outcomes for Hispanic children, it is also simply the right thing to do. There has been some progress, but far too many Hispanic youngsters still are not getting off to a good start and, as a result, their life chances are being truncated unnecessarily. We can—and must—do more to accelerate the rate of their educational progress in the years and decades ahead.

Although beyond the scope of its mission, the Task Force recognizes that improving academic outcomes for many Hispanic and other children will require much more effective responses to a wide array of societal issues in addition to expanding and improving their educational opportunities. For example, extreme family poverty is a source of family duress, family instability, family mobility and health problems that can undermine learning, even when children attend high quality preschools and elementary schools.¹ The movement for schools to provide social services in areas such as health and child care reflects the importance of these matters.

Hispanic Children Are an Important Asset for Our Nation’s Future

Economically, politically, and socially, Hispanic children will play an increasingly important role in our nation’s future. Just in terms of sheer numbers, their impact will be significant. An analysis commissioned by the Task Force of the demographics of children in 2000 found that, among the 33.4 million children in the United States in the 0-8 age group, 6.8 million were Hispanic—20% of the total.² It is projected that Hispanics will be more than a quarter of this age segment as early as 2030 (see Figure 1). Consistent with this projection, 23% of the babies born in the United States in 2004 had Hispanic mothers, up from 21% in 2000.³ This rapid growth of the number of young Hispanic children is being driven by the high, sustained level of immigration; the large number of young adults who are in their family formation years; and the relatively high total fertility rate among Hispanic women (mainly among those who are immigrants).⁴

**Figure 1: Percentage of U.S. Children Ages 0-8 in Specified Racial/Ethnic Groups
1980 - 2050**



Source: Hernandez, D. (2006). *Young Hispanic Children in the U.S.: A Demographic Portrait Based on Census 2000*. Report to the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University.

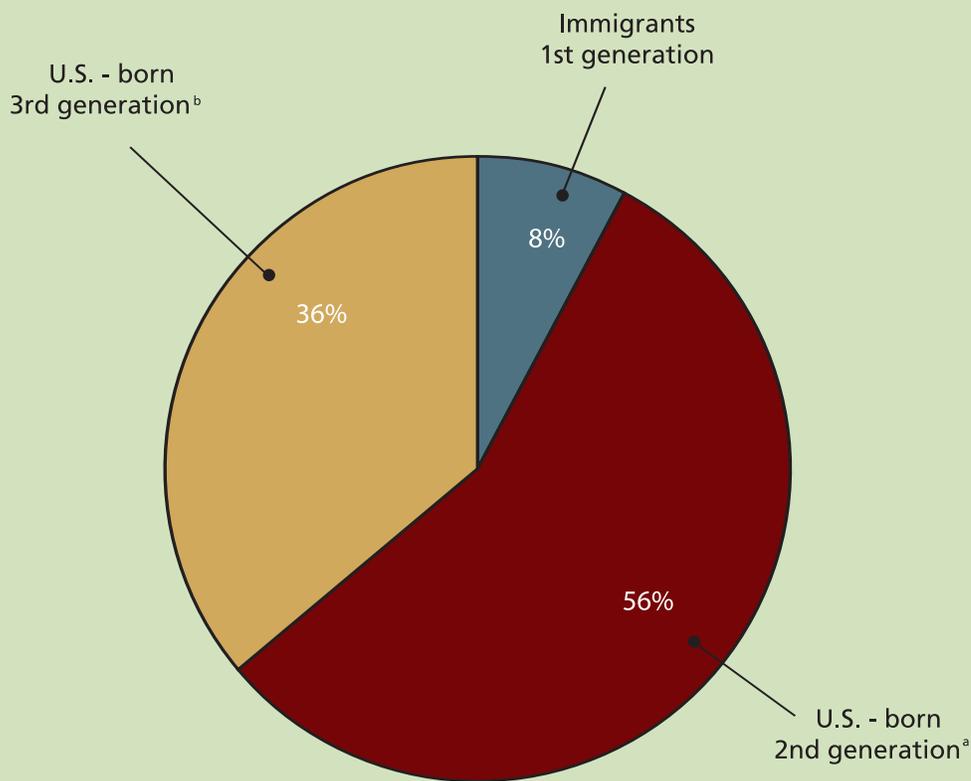
Moreover, Hispanics are becoming an increasing presence across the country. Historically, Hispanics have been concentrated in a few states, and that is still the case. In 2000, about four-fifths of young Hispanic children—over 5.3 million youngsters—lived in just nine states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey, Colorado, and New Mexico. Half were living in just two states: California and Texas. However, the growing numbers of young Hispanic children in other states was becoming evident as well. In 24 states, at least one in eight of the children in the 0-8 age group was Hispanic.⁵ The growth has been very rapid in several states that had small Hispanic populations as recently as 15 years ago. For example, in both Georgia and North Carolina, the share of the babies born to Hispanic mothers grew from 2% in 1990 to 14% in 2004.⁶

As Hispanics account for a growing proportion of our population, Hispanic children are becoming an increasingly important asset economically. Over the next few decades, the number of workers versus non-workers is projected to decline significantly. In 2000, there were 106 workers for every

100 non-workers. But the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2050, there will be only 90 workers for every 100 non-workers.⁷ To maintain a strong economy and be competitive internationally, it is critical for all our nation's children, including Hispanic children, to receive the preparation they need today to become our nation's productive workforce tomorrow.

In addition, Hispanic children are an increasingly important asset for our nation politically and socially. Most young Hispanics were born in the United States and thus are U.S. citizens (see Figure 2). As a growing proportion of the future electorate, it is important for them to become informed, engaged citizens and to participate fully in society. Moreover, Hispanic families have many strengths that can contribute to our social fabric. Efforts to build on these strengths and promote greater social equity will be essential to creating a society characterized by social cohesion rather than divisiveness.

Figure 2: Percentage of Hispanic Children Who Are Immigrants versus Born in the United States



^a For second generation children, one or both parents may be immigrants.

^b For third generation children, the category includes not only children who have two U.S.-born parents, but also those who may have U.S.-born grandparents, great grandparents, and so forth. (That is, the category includes children who are technically third generation as well as those who are technically, perhaps, fourth or ninth generation.)

Source: Hernandez, D. (2006). *Young Hispanic Children in the U.S.: A Demographic Portrait Based on Census 2000. Report to the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics.* Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University.

Hispanic Families Face Challenges, But Also Bring Strengths

Many Hispanic families face significant challenges in supporting their children's efforts to succeed in school. A number of demographic characteristics of the Hispanic population—such as low parental education, poverty, and lack of English skills—tend to be correlated with children's lower academic achievement in comparison with White children.⁸

Challenges faced by Hispanic families:

Many Hispanic parents have low education levels.

Throughout the industrialized world, children from families in which the parents have relatively little formal schooling are markedly overrepresented among low academic achievers in school; and, those from families in which the parents have a great deal of higher education are heavily overrepresented among students who excel academically.⁹ Given that pattern, probably the single most important demographic aspect of the young Hispanic population is that, on average, they have parents with relatively little formal education. In 2000, almost 44% of the Hispanic children nationally had mothers who had not graduated from high school compared to only 9% of the Whites.¹⁰ Less than 10% of the Hispanic children had a mother with a bachelor's degree or more, while 30% of the Whites had a mother who was a college graduate.¹¹

Many Hispanic children live in poverty.

A much larger percentage of young Hispanic children than Whites live in poverty. Among children in the 0-8 age segment in 2000, about 26% of the Hispanics were below the poverty line compared to only 9% of Whites. The gap also was very large for children in low-income families (with low-income defined as below twice the official poverty line). About 58% of all young Hispanic children were from low-income families, while this was the case for 27% of Whites.¹² These high poverty and low-income rates were not primarily a function of high unemployment rates—about 93% of the young Hispanic children in 2000 had fathers who were employed full- or part-time. Rather, they were mainly due to low wage rates and relatively high levels of part-time employment, which were related to the low average educational attainment levels of the Hispanic fathers and mothers.

Many Hispanic children are English language learners.

Many young Hispanic children are from families in which Spanish is the sole or primary language spoken in the home. As a result, many of these children start school with little or no knowledge of English. For example, in a large national sample of children who started kindergarten in 1998, about 30% of the Hispanic youngsters were not proficient enough in oral English to be given an English language reading readiness assessment at the beginning of kindergarten.¹³ For most of these children, lack of English skills was an educational "risk" factor in addition to those associated with being from families with low socioeconomic (SES) circumstances. Nearly three-quarters were from families with low incomes and/or with parents with relatively little formal schooling.¹⁴

Despite the challenges, Hispanic families and communities are often typified by enormous strengths that contribute to society and serve as a resource for Hispanic youngsters. One of the

most important of these strengths is *familismo*, a conception of the family in which family ties are very strong and family members are fully committed to the support of each other. For Hispanic children, this means that their parents and other family members are usually deeply and actively concerned about their educational, emotional, and material well-being.¹⁵

Strengths of Hispanic families and communities:

Most Hispanic families are strongly committed to education.

Similar to other groups in the United States, Hispanic parents have consistently demonstrated a very strong commitment to their children's education. Hispanic parents who are immigrants with little formal education are especially aware of the need for their children to succeed in school.¹⁶ This commitment to education includes not only school academics, but also moral and social development.¹⁷ The latter, of course, are essential components of education in a democracy—components that are often given too little attention as our society works to raise academic achievement.¹⁸

Many Hispanic families provide for strong emotional well-being.

Two parents are present in most Hispanic immigrant families. Moreover, there is evidence that young children in Mexican immigrant families—with their strong structures—enjoy high levels of mental health. Apart from its inherent benefits, emotional well-being is valuable educationally, allowing the children to enter school able to work well in the classroom with their teachers and peers.¹⁹

Most Hispanic families have fathers who are employed.

Even though many of the fathers in Hispanic families have little formal education, the overwhelming majority is employed and striving to provide for the material needs of their children.

These characteristics are very important indicators of Hispanic parents' capacities to support the healthy development of their children. They also mean that, as our society works to expand and improve the quality of early childhood education available to Hispanic children, equivalently strong efforts will continue to be made on the family side, even though many of the families do not have some of the resources typically available to middle class and high SES families.

Hispanic Achievement Lags Behind Whites through Elementary School and Beyond

Extensive efforts to improve minority educational outcomes have been undertaken at all levels of the education system since the mid-1980s. The federal government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is one of the most visible recent legislative initiatives with a heavy emphasis on raising kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) achievement of Hispanic and other minority students. Nevertheless, large achievement gaps persist. Hispanic students have had much lower levels of academic achievement than Whites since national achievement data first became available by race/ethnicity in the mid-1960s.²⁰ Data from the federal government's National Assessment for

Educational Progress reading and mathematics assessments on the elementary and secondary levels indicate that the achievement gaps are about the same size now as they were in 1990.²¹ On measures of reading readiness, math concepts, and general knowledge, Hispanic youngsters are already behind their White peers when they start kindergarten, and continue to lag behind Whites at the end of the primary grades.²² Hispanics are overrepresented among students with such low achievement that they are at-risk of eventually not graduating from high school, and they are



underrepresented among those who are academically well prepared to attend college.²³

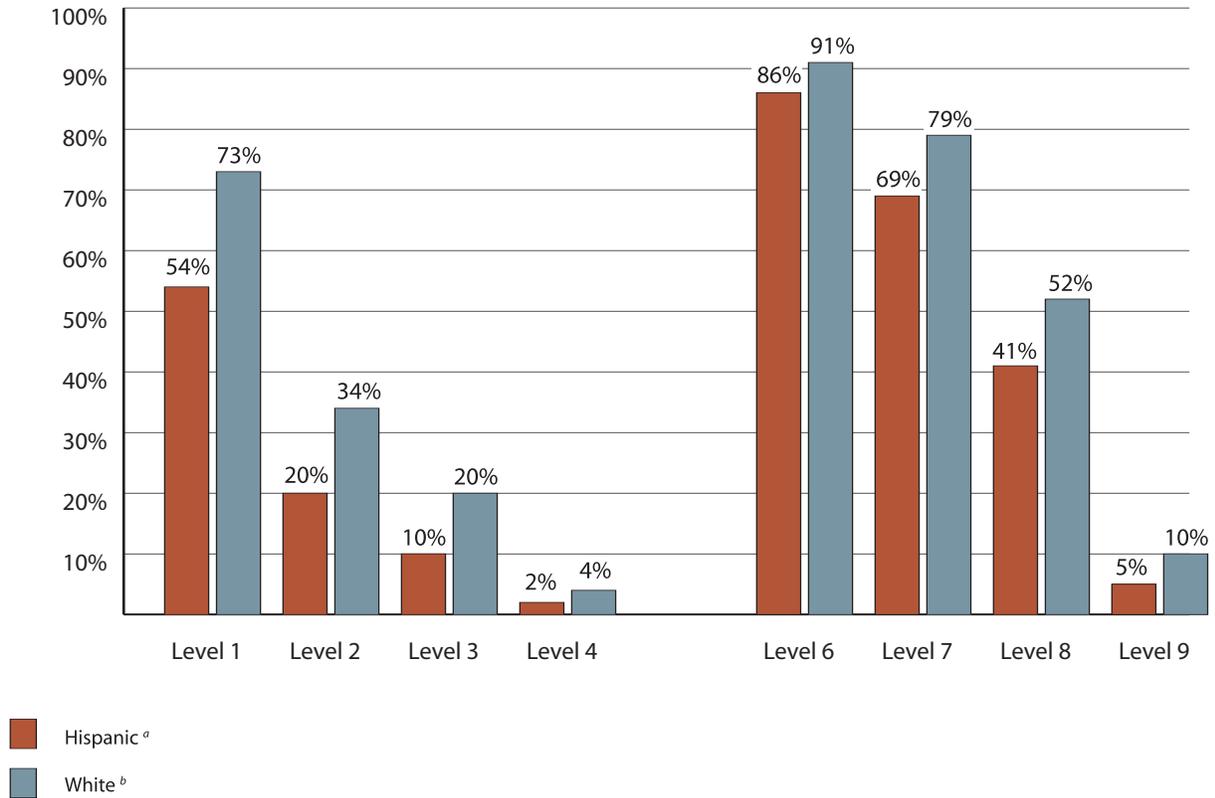
Moreover, not only is Hispanic students' academic achievement low compared to that of Whites and some other groups in the United States, results from international assessments make it clear that, compared with other nations, Hispanics are achieving far below industrial society norms. While U.S. White students have generally had average or above average scores on these international

assessments, U.S. Hispanic (and African American) students have had well below average scores.²⁴ Given Hispanics' large and growing share of the U.S. population, the nation's competitive status internationally will increasingly depend on bringing Hispanics fully into the mainstream of industrial society academic achievement patterns.

To better understand the underlying factors contributing to this achievement gap among Hispanic children, the Task Force commissioned a study of kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) reading and mathematics achievement using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K). This study provides a much more detailed picture than has been available to date of how Hispanic academic achievement compares to the achievement of Whites in the early years of school.

Overall, the study found that Hispanic children started kindergarten well behind White youngsters on measures of reading and math skills, and that they were still well behind in both subjects at the end of the fifth grade, but the gaps were somewhat smaller, as illustrated by the reading data presented in Figure 3. (The data on students' math skills are similar.) Even with 30% excluded that did not have oral English skills strong enough for them to take the English-language reading readiness assessment at the start of kindergarten, the data show that Hispanic children lagged well behind third generation Whites in all skill areas both at the start of kindergarten and at the end of fifth grade.

Figure 3: Reading Skills at the Start of Kindergarten and at the End of Fifth Grade



Key: Percent scoring at or above each of the following ECLS-K reading proficiency levels for K-5 years^c

- Level 1: Recognition of letters
- Level 2: Understanding beginning sounds of words
- Level 3: Understanding ending sounds of words
- Level 4: Sight recognition of words
- Level 5: Comprehension of words in context
- Level 6: Literal inference from words in text
- Level 7: Extrapolating from text to derive meaning
- Level 8: Evaluating and interpreting beyond text
- Level 9: Evaluating nonfiction

^a The Hispanic data do not include the 30% of the Hispanic children in the ECLS-K sample that did not have oral English skills strong enough for them to take the English-language reading readiness assessment as they entered kindergarten.

^b The White students in the study were limited to those who were third generation Americans, because they represent the “baseline” group within the White population.

^c Levels defined in Princiotta, D., and Flanagan, K. (2006). Findings from the Fifth-Grade Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Source: Reardon, S.F., and Galindo, C. (2006). *Patterns of Hispanic Students’ Math and English Literacy Test Scores. Report to the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics.* Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University.

The study also looked at the achievement patterns of Hispanics for a number of subpopulations, including: 1) low, middle, and high SES Hispanics; 2) several Hispanic national origin groups, such as those of Mexican and Central American descent; and 3) first, second, and third generation Mexican Americans. Key findings from the analysis of ECLS-K data for these subpopulations include the following:

The achievement differences across the K-5 years were closely associated with social class differences.

For both Hispanics and Whites, children from low SES circumstances had much lower reading and math achievement than children from high SES circumstances. But, while only 8% of Whites were from families in the lowest SES quintile, 36% of the Hispanics were. In contrast, 30% of the White children were in the highest SES quintile compared to 9% of the Hispanics. Despite the critical importance of these differences in social class, the analysis also found that modest-sized gaps existed between Hispanics and Whites in all social class segments at the start of kindergarten, but that a mixed picture emerged by the end of the fifth grade.²⁵ In the higher SES segments, Hispanics continued to lag behind Whites somewhat, but in the lower SES segments, fifth grade Hispanics fared about the same as their White counterparts. However, if the scores of the 30% excluded at the start of kindergarten due to limited English skills were included in the analysis, gaps would have emerged among the fifth grade lower SES segments as well.²⁶ Such findings are consistent with another recent national study of high school reading skills that found fairly large within-class achievement gaps between Hispanic and White sophomores at all SES levels.²⁷

Mexican American children had the lowest reading and math achievement levels among Hispanic children from the various Hispanic national origin groups.

In terms of their heritage, about two-thirds of Hispanic children are of Mexican descent (65%). The other third is quite diverse, including children of Puerto Rican (9%), Central American (7%), South American (6%), Dominican (3%), and Cuban (2%) origins.²⁸ Reading and math achievement varies considerably among these groups. For example, the study found that those of Mexican and Central American heritage lagged well behind Whites in reading. In contrast, the reading skill patterns for those of South American heritage were virtually identical to those of Whites. Those of Cuban and Puerto Rican descent were close to the White pattern as well. These achievement differences among Hispanic groups were related to SES differences. Children of South American and Cuban origins had parent education levels that were generally similar to those of Whites, while the other Hispanic groups had much lower parent education levels.

Third generation Mexican Americans had higher reading and math achievement than first and second generation Mexican Americans at the start of kindergarten and across the elementary years.

These better outcomes for third generation Mexican American children were related to the fact that they had stronger family SES profiles than first and second generation Mexican Americans. For instance, more of the third generation children were from families in the top two SES

groups.²⁹ Other studies have also found evidence of intergenerational progress. For example, between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of native-born 25 to 29-year-old Hispanics with high school degrees grew from 48% to 79%, and those with college degrees grew from less than 5% to about 16%. In contrast, there was essentially no change in these statistics for their foreign-born counterparts.³⁰

Group advancement has historically been an intergenerational process, related to improvements in family SES profiles across generations. This is true for Hispanics, just as it has been for other groups throughout history: The data indicate that the outcomes for Hispanic children are improving with each generation. However, unlike in the past, today's technological economy demands a highly-educated workforce, and we must do what we can to accelerate the educational advancement of Hispanic children as much as possible to enable their full participation in all sectors of society.

Early Childhood Programs Offer Opportunities for Raising Hispanic Achievement

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a great deal of effort to develop education strategies that can help raise student achievement. At the elementary and secondary levels, these efforts have been focused heavily, albeit not exclusively, on raising the achievement of at-risk low SES students. In addition, over the past decade, there have been enormous efforts to expand and improve prekindergarten (pre-K) opportunities for low SES children, especially those from minority groups. Such efforts have added appreciably to the knowledge base on which educators can draw to improve school readiness and to raise academic achievement for many Hispanic children who are disproportionately represented among the low SES groups. However, much remains to be learned about how to improve infant/toddler programs, pre-K, and early elementary school for these children, particularly English language learners from low SES families.

Infant/Toddler Programs

School readiness and school achievement patterns have much of their foundations in the period from birth to three, a time when the home and family typically play the dominant role in the development of children. One of the most important ways in which families can promote school readiness is by providing language and literacy development opportunities. The more parents talk and read to their children, for example, the larger the children's vocabularies are at age three. In turn, the size of children's vocabularies at age three is a good predictor not only of their reading skills at the end of the first grade, but also of their reading comprehension skills on through high school.³¹ Moreover, research has established that, in general, parents with college and graduate degrees provide many more of these language and literacy development opportunities to their children than parents with high school degrees or less. Children with well-educated parents start school with larger vocabularies and stronger prereading skills than children with less well-educated parents.³²

As noted earlier, compared with White mothers, a much higher percentage of Hispanic mothers has not completed high school and a much lower percentage has a college degree. In addition, research has found that Hispanic mothers generally talk and read less to their children than White

mothers, beginning in the infant/toddler period, and that there tend to be fewer literacy-related materials, such as children's books, available in Hispanic homes than in White homes.³³ Some researchers have estimated that these and related parenting differences account for between one-quarter and one-half of racial/ethnic readiness gaps at the start of kindergarten.³⁴ Clearly, these are consequential differences for Hispanic children.

Infant/toddler programs can provide a strategy to supplement the language and literacy development opportunities in the home, expanding access to this very important factor in school readiness. However, only a relatively small number of children is served by infant/toddler programs explicitly designed, at least in part, to promote school readiness. The largest federal government program with a substantial education component for infants and toddlers is Early Head Start (see Box 1).

Early Head Start has recently been evaluated through a randomized trial involving 17 programs in which Hispanics were well represented. The evaluation found promising language and cognitive development benefits for the children by age three,³⁵ which suggests that well designed programs for infants and toddlers have the potential to help improve the school readiness of many low SES children, including Hispanics (see Box 1).

Box 1

A Promising Program for Infants and Toddlers: Early Head Start

Early Head Start serves mothers as well as their children. The program was established in the mid-1990s to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning. Early Head Start is operating in more than 700 locations across the country and currently enrolls about 62,000 families with infants and toddlers. There are three basic types of Early Head Start programs—those that are home-based (with services delivered exclusively in the home), those that are center-based, and those that offer both home-based and center-based services. Similar to Head Start, Early Head Start programs offer comprehensive services, including parent education, health care, and childcare.

Program evaluation findings: Language and cognitive development benefits by age three.

For more information, see the Early Head Start web site at:
http://www.headstartinfo.org/infocenter/ehs_tkit3.htm

Prekindergarten Programs

Over the past two decades, there has been growing evidence that high quality pre-K programs can make meaningful improvements in the school readiness of low SES children and help them achieve better long-term educational outcomes in school.³⁶ More recently, the proliferation and expansion of state-funded pre-K programs has proven invaluable to the study of these programs, as their structure and design vary considerably and many are being rigorously evaluated.

For example, there are full- and half-day programs as well as programs that serve children for one year and for two years. There are different mixes of programs in terms of the extent that they operate through schools and through other center-based entities. There are variations among state programs in teacher-child ratios and in teacher education requirements. Different curricular and instructional approaches are being tested. The per-student investments being made by the states also vary considerably. Some programs are serving only low SES children, while others include non-poor children as well. Of great importance to Hispanics, experience is being gained with both English-only and dual-language (English and Spanish) strategies for pre-K programs that serve Hispanic children.



The early results of evaluations of some state programs are already available. Among the most important early findings are from an evaluation of Oklahoma’s universal pre-K program (see Box 2). The evaluation looked at the pre-K programs in the Tulsa public schools, which serve a racially and ethnically diverse group of children, including many Hispanics. Also, because it is a universal program, there is information on the benefits for both poor and non-poor youngsters.³⁷ Significantly, the evaluation has documented benefits for children from all racial/ethnic groups, including Hispanics, and for both poor and non-poor children. Substantial cognitive gains were found on assessments of prereading, prewriting, and math reasoning skills. In “age-equivalent” terms, the participants had scores equal to those usually registered by children four to eight months older, depending on the skill area. Overall, the gains were not quite as large as the best model programs, but they were bigger than the average gains documented in evaluations of some other state programs.³⁸ Over the next 5 to 10 years, more will be learned about the extent to which there are long-term gains.

Box 2

A Promising Pre-K Program: Oklahoma's UPK

Oklahoma is one of the few states that offer a universal pre-K (UPK) program as a voluntary part of its public education system. A larger share of four-year-olds attends either a state- or federally-funded pre-K program in Oklahoma than in any other state. Moreover, Oklahoma established high standards for its pre-K program. Key quality program standards include:

- early childhood certified teachers who hold at least a bachelor's degree, pass an Early Childhood subject area competency test, and are paid on the same salary schedule as other K-12 teachers;
- low class size (20) and an adult-child ratio of 1:10;
- encouragement of family involvement;
- age- and developmentally-appropriate curriculum standards that align with state K-12 standards; and
- professional development (continuing education) required for all certified personnel and also provided by school districts for teacher assistants.

Program evaluation findings: Substantial gains in reading and math, including for Hispanic children.

For more information, see the Oklahoma web site at:
<http://www.sde.state.ok.us/pro/prek>

For quality pre-K programs to benefit Hispanic youngsters, however, it will also be important to understand and address the barriers to access. Both poor and non-poor Hispanics have long been underrepresented among children who attend some form of center-based child care and pre-K programs.³⁹ Although the reasons for the relatively low attendance of Hispanics have not been firmly established, one factor appears to be lack of capacity. In an analysis commissioned by the Task Force of the pre-K supply-demand situation for Hispanics in two large urban areas (Los Angeles and Chicago), researchers found an overall shortage of center-based pre-K slots in Hispanic neighborhoods.⁴⁰ Other factors that were cited in another recent survey include parents' lack of knowledge about the programs available in their communities and the inability to afford the cost.⁴¹

Early Elementary Programs

Over the past twenty years, many elementary school strategies for raising student achievement have been designed and tested. Much of this work has focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, including Hispanics and other minorities. Recognizing the difficulty of making substantive changes in schools, many of these strategies have attempted to improve a number of aspects of elementary schools at the same time, including: curriculum and instruction in key areas such as reading and math; student assessment; school leadership and management; staff development; and parent involvement.⁴²

A study commissioned by the Task Force on a number of these strategies found that several are contributing to higher achievement among Hispanics in the primary grades. Overall, the gains tend to be modest in size.⁴³ Nevertheless, the study found that the most promising strategies had a strong literacy focus that can be culturally and linguistically tailored to the needs of Hispanic students.⁴⁴ One of the strategies with the most extensive evidence of effectiveness, Success for All, has a Spanish-English bilingual version of its program. These findings are consistent with growing evidence that Hispanic children who begin school as English language learners generally learn more if instruction takes place in both English and their primary language, Spanish (see Box 3).⁴⁵

Box 3

A Promising K-3 Strategy: English-plus-Spanish

English-plus-Spanish (EPS) refers to the wide range of formal and informal approaches to using both English and Spanish in the classroom. An example of an informal approach would be classrooms in which instruction is mainly in English, but teachers routinely use Spanish extensively to clarify points or ask questions when the students' knowledge of English is too limited for the exchange. Students also would use varying amounts of both English and Spanish in their own conversations in the classroom. Transitional bilingual education is an example of a common formal approach to EPS education. With it, Hispanic English language learners are taught most subjects (math, science, etc.) in Spanish for two or three years while they are learning English.

Research findings: EPS approaches produce higher achievement, on average, than English-only immersion strategies.

For more information, see García, E., and Jensen. B. (2007). *Language Development and Early Education of Young Hispanic Children in the United States: A Research Synthesis*. Tempe, AZ: National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics at: <http://www.ecehispanic.org>.

A major challenge for schools in their efforts to reduce achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and their middle class counterparts is that disadvantaged children tend to lose ground in reading and math relative to middle class youngsters during the summer months when school is not in session.⁴⁶ The educational community has recently increased its efforts to address this issue. In its review of research in this area, the Task Force found some evidence that multi-year summer programs—those that students attend for two or three successive summers—can help raise the achievement of many disadvantaged children during the primary grades.⁴⁷ This is an approach that needs to be tested more extensively, including with Hispanic children.

Recommendations for Action

The Task Force’s mission has been to develop recommendations for expanding and improving early childhood education for Hispanics. If the educational advancement of Hispanics is to be accelerated, young Hispanic children need both more and better opportunities to learn during their early childhood years. To accomplish this, improvements are needed in three main areas: increasing Hispanic children’s access to programs; increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists; and increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate language and literacy development strategies. In addition, widespread support—from both the public and private sectors—will be required. Thus, the Task Force’s recommendations are directed to five key groups: state governments, the federal government, private foundations, Hispanic organizations, and education researchers.

Increasing Hispanic Access to Early Childhood Education Programs

Early childhood education opportunities need to be expanded for all Hispanic children through greater access to quality programs at all levels: infant/toddler programs, pre-K programs, and early elementary school and summer programs. The Task Force strongly recommends giving high priority to expanding access for Hispanic children from low socioeconomic circumstances, especially those who are English language learners in immigrant families, as these are the Hispanic children with the lowest achievement patterns in school. Nevertheless, the Task Force recommends that early childhood education opportunities be expanded for all Hispanics, because middle class Hispanic children also achieve at somewhat lower levels than their White counterparts.

To increase Hispanic access to quality early childhood education programs, the Task Force recommends the following:

State governments should—

- Expand and increase infant/toddler programs in their states that are serving, or have the potential to serve, large numbers of Hispanic children and their parents;
- Continue to expand their state-funded prekindergarten initiatives, with the objective of creating voluntary universal pre-K systems in most states within the next 10 to 20 years.

- Support efforts to provide information to Hispanic parents on the availability of pre-K programs in their communities; and
- Provide school districts in their states with resources to fund multi-year summer programs for their low SES students on a voluntary basis.

The federal government should—

- Undertake a substantial expansion of Early Head Start and Head Start that will help ensure that the low SES Hispanic children have greater access to high quality infant/toddler and pre-K programs.

Increasing the Number of Spanish-speaking Teachers and Language Acquisition Specialists

The evidence indicates that increasing the number of teachers who are proficient in English and Spanish can increase the achievement of Hispanic children who are not proficient in English when they start school. Because large numbers of Hispanic children are English language learners, there is a pressing need for teachers who are proficient in English and Spanish. One approach might be to attempt to recruit many more Hispanics who are bilingual into teaching. Since there is a limited pool of potential Hispanic teachers who could meet this need,⁴⁸ an additional approach might be to develop programs to help monolingual English speakers become proficient in Spanish in order to communicate more effectively with their Hispanic students and their parents. In circumstances in which the students are linguistically very diverse or when only a small number speak Spanish, the best course may be to make extensive use of teaching specialists who are experts in strategies that can help students become proficient in a second language.⁴⁹ For example, research is beginning to identify areas in which English language learners may require modifications and accommodations in instructional practices, if they are to maximize their progress.⁵⁰ Having second language acquisition specialists available in school districts to provide ongoing training and advice to kindergarten through third grade (K-3) teachers would be one possible approach.

To increase the numbers of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists, the Task Force recommends the following:

State governments should—

- Initiate programs to increase: 1) the number of pre-K and K-3 teachers in their states who are proficient in English and Spanish; and 2) the number of pre-K and K-3 teaching specialists in second language acquisition; and
- Support pay and benefit levels for pre-K teachers and administrators that are equal to those of public school teachers and administrators as a means of providing the economic incentives to recruit and maintain a well-educated, reasonably stable group of prekindergarten professionals.

Hispanic organizations should—

- Jointly develop detailed proposals for state governments for programs to increase the number of English- and Spanish-proficient early childhood educators.

Education researchers should—

- Propose a set of tests on the use of second language acquisition specialists for schools and classrooms in which English-plus-Spanish strategies would not typically be appropriate.

Increasing Efforts to Design, Test, and Evaluate Language and Literacy Development Strategies

Better learning opportunities for Hispanic children also means providing infant/toddler programs, pre-K programs, and early elementary school programs that do a better job of providing activities and experiences that can help Hispanic youngsters to develop language, numeracy, and other knowledge and skills that are similar to the activities and experiences of those youngsters from families in which the parents have a great deal of formal education as well substantial economic and other resources that support learning.

More opportunities to learn also literally means providing more time for young Hispanic children to acquire the knowledge and skills that provide the foundations for academic success. For some children, it may be necessary for them to have access to programs at all levels: infant/toddler programs, pre-K when they are three and four, and K-3 education that includes extended-day programs and/or multi-year summer programs.

Finally, for the many young Hispanic children from immigrant families who are English language learners, better also means having learning environments that make more effective and respectful use of their primary language and of the cultures of their families.

Thus, the Task Force recommends that large investments be made in efforts to design, test and evaluate infant/toddler, pre-K and K-3 language and literacy development strategies for low SES Hispanics. These efforts should include extensive experimentation with the amount of time low SES Hispanic and other youngsters spend in these programs. High priority should be given to determining how best to build on the primary language of low SES Hispanic children from Spanish-speaking homes. Although currently available strategies provide valuable benefits, there is much room for improvement. One of the consistent findings of evaluations of early childhood education program strategies is that even the best ones produce modest developmental and academic achievement benefits. This should be expected. Although the Task Force believes much better approaches can be developed, the hard work of raising achievement will continue to be an incremental, cumulative process. Developmental advances for infants and toddlers can contribute to further gains in pre-K, which in turn can contribute to higher achievement at the K-3 level.

To increase efforts to design, test, and evaluate language and literacy development strategies, the Task Force recommends the following:

State governments should—

- Establish information systems that would be used by school districts and state education departments to disaggregate their students into subpopulations defined simultaneously in terms of race/ethnicity, parent education level, family income, generational status (whether they are first, second, or third generation children), and primary language spoken in the home.

The federal government should—

- Increase investments in efforts to design, test and evaluate infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 language and literacy development strategies for low SES Hispanics;
- Underwrite tests of programs designed to produce large increases in the number of: 1) English and Spanish proficient and culturally knowledgeable pre-K and K-3 teachers; and 2) pre-K and K-3 teaching specialists in second language acquisition;
- Create assessments of Spanish language proficiency and development for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age Hispanic children from immigrant families in which Spanish is the primary language of the home; and improve assessments of English proficiency for Hispanic English language learners at the pre-K and K-3 levels;
- Expand investment in longitudinal studies of young children, such as the ECLS-K, in a manner that allows for much more extensive analysis of Hispanics and other groups that are achieving below U.S. norms; and
- Expand U.S. participation in international assessments of student achievement in a manner that would allow much more detailed monitoring of how different segments of the nation's population compare to students in other industrialized nations.

Private foundations should—

- Fund long-term efforts to design, test and evaluate infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 language and literacy development strategies for Hispanic children from all SES levels and from immigrant/nonimmigrant families; and
- Work to create some new foundations that would specialize in funding in these areas, and thereby ensure that sustained investments in strategy development would be made over the long-term.

Hispanic organizations should—

- Jointly develop a set of recommendations for specific new or substantially modified approaches to infant/toddler programs, pre-K programs, and K-3 programs for Hispanics that should be tested with funding from the federal government or private foundations; and
- Become leaders in providing literacy development information, materials, and other support to Hispanic parents in all SES segments.

Education researchers should—

- Propose specific combinations of tests of infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 approaches to language development that would provide varying amounts and kinds of such opportunities for low SES children, including low SES Hispanics;
- Suggest a set of tests of English-plus-Spanish approaches for the infant/toddler, preschool and K-3 years that would be designed to provide much better information on their effectiveness and their feasibility of use; and
- Suggest a set of tests of promising strategies, which would be designed to determine what kind of variations in outcomes should be expected with their use on a widespread basis over time.

More Information on the Task Force’s Findings and Recommendations

Para Nuestros Niños: Expanding and Improving Early Education for Hispanics, Main Report presents the detailed analysis, findings, and recommendations on which the Para Nuestros Niños Executive Report is based. The Main Report can be downloaded from the Task Force’s website at: <http://www.ecehispanic.org>.

In addition, as referenced throughout the report, to better understand the context and issues surrounding the educational needs of young Hispanic children, the Task Force commissioned several white papers, policy briefs, and studies on the following topics:

- A demographic portrait based on Census 2000;
- Characteristics and early predictors or indicators of Hispanic infant development;
- Patterns of Hispanic students’ math and English reading test scores in early elementary grades;
- The supply of child care centers across Hispanic communities;
- Comprehensive school reform for Latino elementary school students; and
- Language development of young Hispanic children in the United States.

NOTES

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TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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Professor & Chair
Department of Child & Family Studies
California State University
Los Angeles, California

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Para nuestros niños

National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

La Comisión Nacional para la Educación de la Niñez Hispana

National Task Force
on Early Childhood
Education for Hispanics

c/o Mary Lou Fulton
College of Education
Arizona State University
PO Box 870211
Tempe, AZ
85287-0211

480.965.1315 v
480.965.9144 f

www.ecehispanic.org

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