# Closing Achievement Gaps: Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic Children


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## Executive Summary

The goals of this report are to familiarize Hispanic state legislators and other stakeholders with a range of educational issues confronting the community, as well as to pose potential program and policy solutions. A major premise of the report is that these issues will be addressed and solved through visionary changes in public education.

The overall problem of Hispanic educational achievement is conceptualized as comprising many performance gaps, many levels of positive and negative explanatory factors, and as inseparable from the larger drama of social, political, and demographic changes occurring in the Latino community. In fact, the strengths of Hispanic culture and family life are seen as major assets in improving the educational performance of children and youth. Key benchmarks or primary educational outcomes were reviewed in the following areas: dropout rates; high school achievement in terms of grades and test scores; college-going rates; college completion rates; college achievement in terms of grades; matriculation to professional and graduate schools; and participation in high skill/high wage jobs and careers.

Contributing factors to these outcomes, as well as potential program and policy solutions, were discussed in the following areas:

- Preschool education
- Time devoted to learning
- Maximizing intellectual rigor
- Better trained teachers
- Learning resources, programs, and technology
- Social organization of schools
- Academic choices and transitions
- Enabling Hispanic parents

At a more general level, the report also discusses how the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislatures (NHCSL) as an organization can address these issues, as well as individual NHCSL members in their own states.

## Introduction

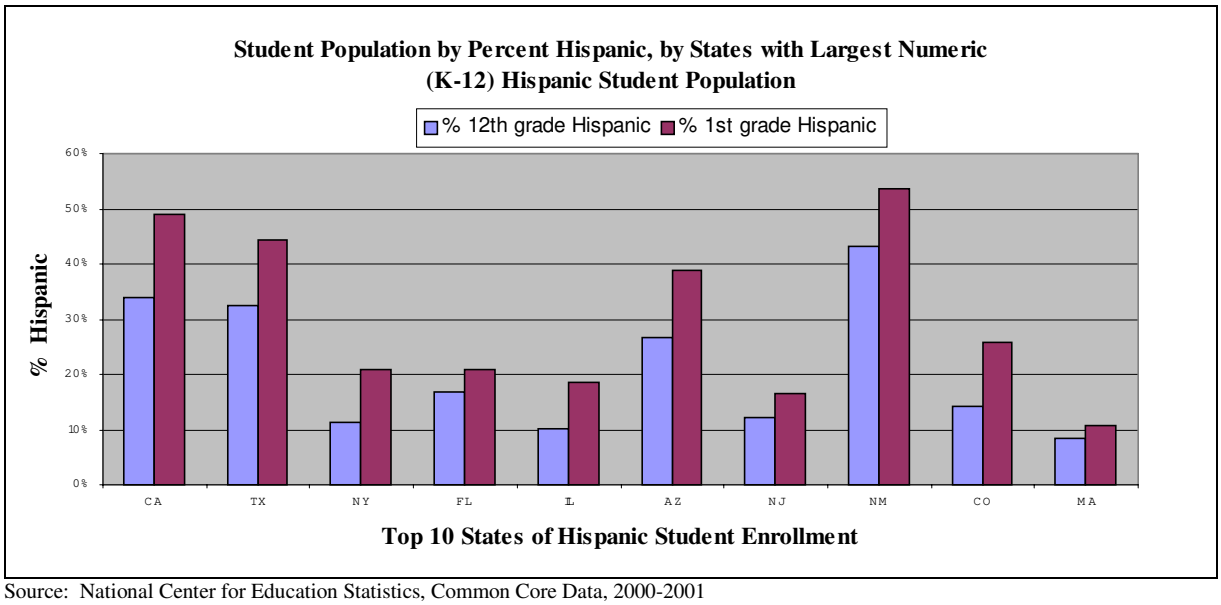
The importance of educational performance has never been more important for Hispanic[1] communities, families, and individuals and for the nation as a whole. Major changes in demographics and political economies, along with our understanding of those changes, makes this issue particularly acute. For example:

- The results of the 2000 census, now increasingly available in a variety of reports and analyses, document what many readers of this report already knew. That is, the rapid growth of the Latino population nationwide, the attainment of plurality or majority status by Hispanics in several major metropolitan areas, and the diffusion of Latino populations into states and regions – particularly the historic South – that have not been traditional destinations. A telling statistic in this regard: 23 of the fifty states now have Latinos outnumbering African-Americans and Asians, and nationally Latinos have surpassed African-Americans in population. One in nine Americans is now of Latino descent and in some states, like California, Texas and New Mexico, Latinos are now one of every two pupils in first grade. Today's Latino children will be a significant percentage of tomorrow's working adults in little over a decade.




**Figure 1**

[1] The authors of this report use the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably to refer to individuals who trace their origin or ancestry to the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. It should be noted that the diverse communities that comprise the Hispanic or Latino population in the United States also vary in terms of educational outcomes and processes, although these issues have not been addressed in this report.




Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Data, 2000-2001

**Figure 2**

- These same census databases indicated that the overall level of educational attainment among Latinos has made minimal advances since 1990[2].

- In parallel with these demographic shifts, the US has led a global economic transformation that has resulted in a burgeoning "knowledge" economy[I] that drives growth at metropolitan, regional, and national levels. Characterized by an ever-increasing role of technology in products and markets, tight networks of international business partnering and trade relations, a greater emphasis on entrepreneurial enterprises and a growing importance of science, the knowledge economy has also redefined the nature and scope of future jobs. Rather than high school graduation being the entry level for employment, any job with a future now demands some level of postsecondary education.

The current situation represents a unique opportunity for analysis and future action. The challenge of improving educational outcomes creates a historic confluence of private interests and social equity goals that makes the era of well-meaning but inadequate public policies no longer acceptable. Without doing what is right and moral in improving educational opportunities and outcomes for minority children, the long-term prospects for maintaining the economic vitality of the country are doubtful. In this sense, the "stakeholders" in this policy arena go beyond traditional educational advocacy and community based organizations. Leading-edge companies, technology-based industry, and those organizations committed to a robust and participative political economy are all

[2] While this report focuses on Hispanic educational issues, many of the problems and proposed solutions parallel those that are valid for African Americans. We owe much to the leadership of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators for their November 2001 report: *Closing the Achievement Gap: Improving Educational Outcomes for African American Children.* There are many potential opportunities for forging policy alliances around these issues.

aligned around this issue and the findings in this report indicate that this topic should be one of national concern to all Americans. The question is what to do.

In approaching this challenge, the twenty or so authors of and contributors to this report were most firmly united on one important premise. That is, one of the great strengths and hallmarks of American democracy is its commitment to an inclusive, strong, self-renewing, but primarily public educational system. While recognizing the historic strengths of private education, we are nonetheless convinced that the public educational system will respond once again to this newest challenge, of improving the educational chances of yet another student population.

**Goals and Organization of the Report.** This report is targeted toward an audience of Hispanic state legislators, although it will be informative and hopefully inspiring for a variety of readers. While substantively focused on issues of education, it is also a celebration of the values and strengths of Hispanic culture and the promise of children everywhere. As such, it addresses two goals:

- To foster a shared level of understanding among Hispanic legislators nationwide about the symptoms, root causes, and ameliorative change strategies concerning Hispanic educational achievement and attainment
- To articulate and create buy-in to state legislative strategies that might be implemented in piece or in whole across the country

To this end, the report is organized into the following sections:

- A selective review of educational symptoms and primary outcomes
- An analysis of intermediate outcomes and contributing factors
- An analysis of educational change strategies
- A review of state legislative options

The report is not intended to be a detailed, comprehensive review of everything that is known about Hispanic educational processes and outcomes, nor is it an exhaustive consideration of all potential strategies of what can be done. Instead, we will attempt to bring a laser focus on what many educators, researchers, and policymakers think are the most important issues, outcomes, and solutions.

## Nature of the Problem: Educational Symptoms and Primary Outcomes

Like many social problems of this magnitude, educational shortcomings for Hispanics involve a number of underlying complexities, and policymakers need to look at the whole "pipeline" of the educational system, as a continuum of events and participants. As such, it includes:

**Many Gaps, Not One.** There is no single measure of Hispanic educational performance that fully captures the nature of the problem. Rather, there are a number of indicators that are important in different times and settings, and which are measured in different ways.

For example, a measure of language skills among entering kindergartners at age six is qualitatively different than an index of school dropout rate in 10th grade, although both represent important issues as well as potential gaps.

**A Multi-Level Set of Phenomena.** At any given point in the educational process – such as the transition from grade school to middle school - Hispanic students are being exposed to a number of factors that influence educational outcomes. Moreover, these factors are being expressed at different levels of a multi-tiered educational system. At any given time, students may be exposed - directly or indirectly – to influences as varied as the will of the Congress, state educational department directives, school district personnel policies, and classroom educational strategies being implemented by a teacher. Rather than asking what is the cause of the gap, we should ask what are the causes of each gap (in terms of federal, state, local and classroom policies and practices).

**The Primacy of Literacy.** Throughout this report the reader's attention will be focused again and again on the key role that language plays in solving the problems of Hispanic educational attainment and achievement. The authors feel strongly that gaining competency in spoken and written English, as rapidly as possible, is absolutely essential. We believe that this is a process that needs to begin in preschool and that should be pursued with discipline and intelligence throughout the years of schooling. We also believe that the nurturing of literacy among Latinos in America should not be a process that is "subtractive" of the culture[II] and histories of our many Spanish-speaking communities. In fact, it should respect those traditions, as well as recognize the value of a multi-lingual society. This is particularly so in the context of the many and growing cultural and economic ties between North America and the rest of the hemisphere. In summary, we would like to present this report as championing English language literacy, as well as recognizing the unique contributions and history of people of Hispanic heritage.

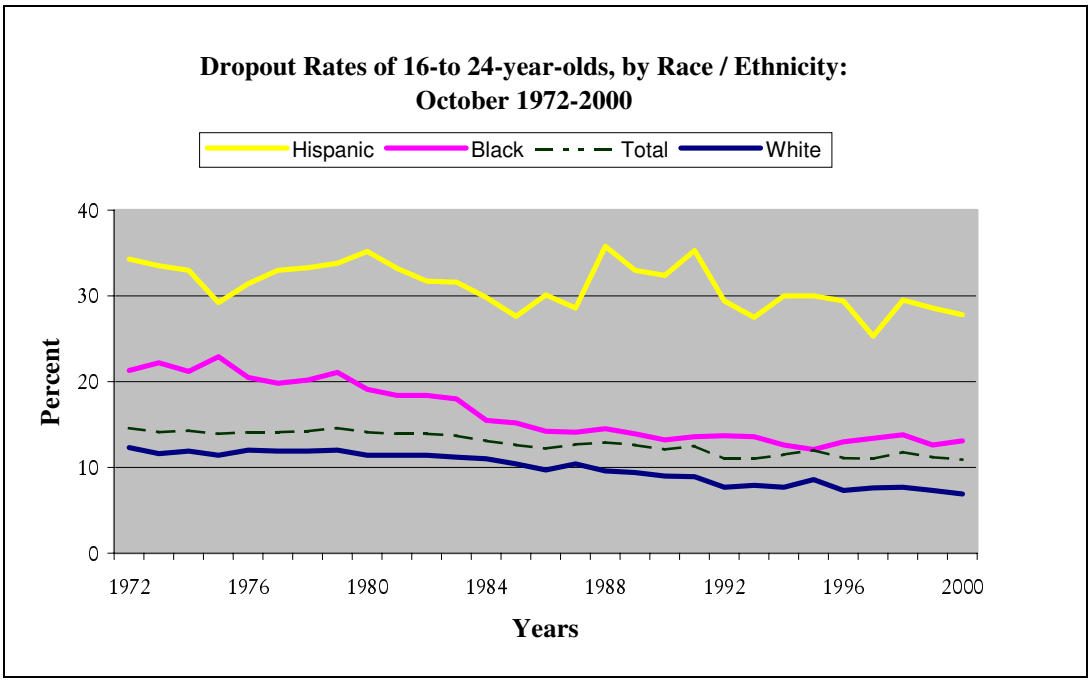
**The Role of "non-educational" Factors.** Educational outcomes and processes for Hispanics are inseparable from the economic, social, and demographic context in which they live. The bare numbers do not speak to the massive social changes being experienced in the Latino community – repeating with a new flavor the historic American immigration phenomenon, experiencing the stress and challenge of political and economic integration, while retaining the core strengths of Hispanic cultures. It is simply harder for low-wage, immigrant families to provide the same types of experiential education, as does the middle class. However, none of these contextual factors should be construed as viable excuses for ill-performing educational systems. Quite simply, if we teach and challenge the children, they will learn. Moreover, if the strengths and vibrancy of Hispanic culture and communities are harnessed to closing educational gaps – rather than used by others as a set of excuses for ineffectual action – we will reach those goals sooner.

**Key Benchmarks: Primary Outcomes.** Given all of the above complicating factors, there are nonetheless a number of quantitative measures or primary outcomes that succinctly describe the Hispanic shortfall in educational performance. Each of these

benchmark or "end-state" outcomes is, in turn, the result of several contributing factors. In the next section we will also describe several intermediate[3] outcomes that are, in themselves, major expressions of how the educational system has failed, and is failing, too many Hispanics children. They are also causally related to the "bottom line" primary outcomes.

**Despite steady educational gains over the years among Hispanic children[III] there are persistent shortcomings across major benchmark measures when compared to other groups in the population. Consider the following:**

- Compared to other groups, Hispanic dropout rates are the highest among the three major ethnic/racial groups [IV] and have not declined since 1972.




Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Current Population Surveys, 1972-2000.

**Figure 3**

- Compared to white non-Hispanics and Asians, Hispanic youth who finish high school will have lower scores on SATs[V] or other standardized measures of performance.
- Compared to white non-Hispanics and Asians, Hispanic youth who finish high school will be less likely to immediately transition[VI] to college.

[3] Intermediate outcomes are those that are causally related to other outcomes later on in the educational process. For example, missing school by being truant or dropping out can be construed as an intermediate outcome, in that it is almost always related later on to the amount that is learned by a student (achievement) and the grade level realized (attainment).

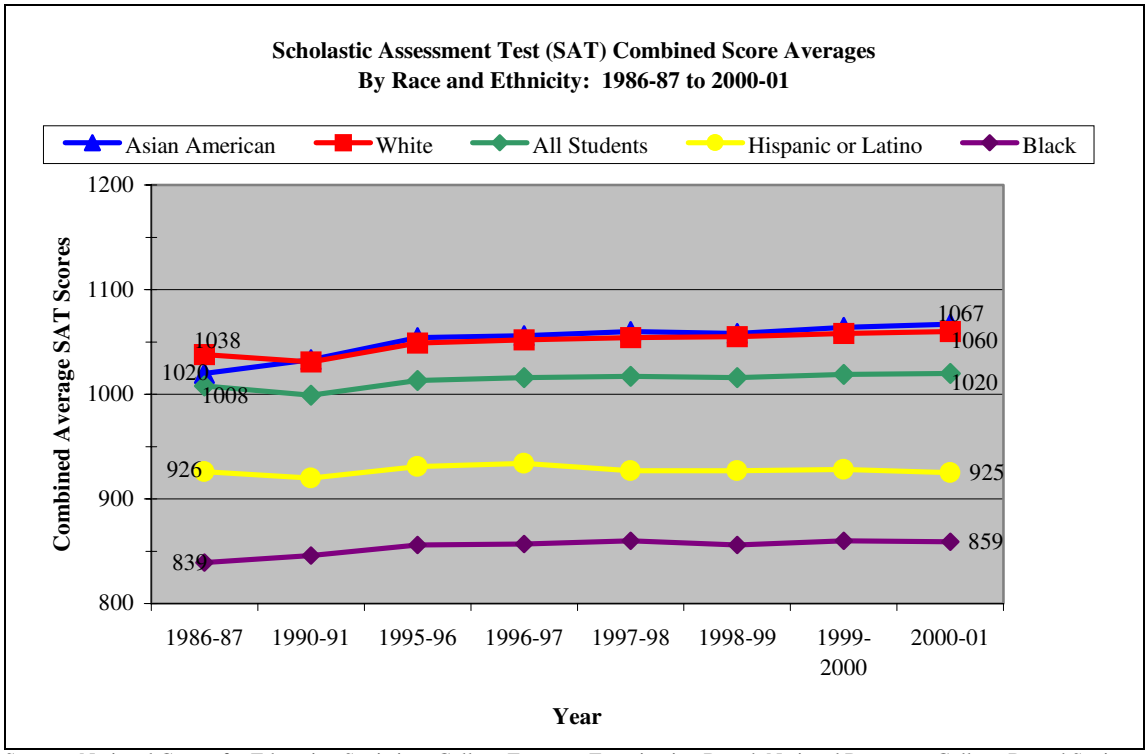
- Compared to other groups, relatively fewer Hispanics complete a four-year college degree[VII] after graduating from high school.

**Table 1: Collegiate Attainment among 25-29 Year-old High School Completers, 2001 (in %)**

| | Hispanic generation | | | | Non-Hispanic | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Foreign born** | **Second** | **Third & higher** | **Total** | **White** | **Black** |
| Associate's degree | 7.2 | 14.6 | 11.0 | 10.3 | 10.5 | 10.0 |
| Bachelor's degree or more | 15.2 | 16.1 | 18.6 | 16.4 | 36.5 | 20.6 |

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, Current Population Survey

- Compared to other groups, relatively fewer Hispanics who complete college have attained a level of academic performance[VIII] (e.g., grades) that will qualify them for admission to graduate or professional schools, and will in effect "under perform" relative to their admission test scores (e.g., SAT I).




Source: National Center for Education Statistics. College Entrance Examination Board, National Report on College-Bound Seniors, various years.

**Figure 4**

- Compared to other groups, relatively fewer Hispanics will complete graduate or professional degree programs, particularly in highly specialized technical disciplines such as science[IX] and engineering.

**Table 2: Break Down of Science and Engineering Professionals, 2001**

| | Percent Distribution by race/ethnicity | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Highest Degree Held** | Total | Black | Asian | White | Hispanic | Native Am. |
| **Doctorate** | 593,700 | 3.6% | 17.6% | 76.7% | 2.1% | 0.0% |
| **Master's Degree** | 1,155,700 | 3.1% | 16.5% | 76.9% | 3.3% | 0.2% |
| **Bachelor's Degree** | 3,223,700 | 7.2% | 12.6% | 76.2% | 3.7% | 0.3% |
| **Associate's Degree** | 657,000 | 11.6% | 5.7% | 80.0% | 2.1% | 0.5% |
| **High School Diploma** | 1,657,000 | 11.3% | 4.4% | 77.8% | 5.5% | 1.0% |

Source: BEST: Building Engineering & Science Talent, Current Population Survey, April 2001.

- Compared to other groups, relatively fewer Hispanics will be employed[X] in the "knowledge economy", in jobs demanding high levels of education, skills, and advanced training.

## Nature of the Problem: Intermediate Outcomes and Contributing Factors

Hispanic children and youth are no different than anyone else in terms of the ingredients of educational success, although those key factors often get distorted for a variety of reasons. In this section we will provide an overview of the consistent and universal themes of educational success – in effect the intermediate events and outcomes that determine long term educational success - and then describe how that scenario gets disrupted for Latino children.

**A Scenario of Success.** Before looking at the shortcomings in the educational experience afforded Hispanic children, it might be useful to look at what an "ideal" educational system looks like, despite the fact that too few children - of whatever background, race, or ethnicity – experience it in contemporary society. Consider:

> *All children tend to be naturally curious, engaged with their environment, motivated and excited about learning. With suitable early parenting and encouragement, cognitive enrichment, and healthy home and community environments, they will build on this framework on into formal school settings. Once there, if they are provided with teachers with high expectations, proven educational tools and materials, challenging and competent instruction, and continuing encouragement by parents and family, they will rapidly acquire the basic skills and concepts of language expression and understanding, math, and science, and then move on to more detailed*

*substantive knowledge in various disciplines and subjects. As they grow in educational attainment and achievement, and stay consistently engaged with schooling, children will expand their competencies and aspirations. They and their parents will become aware of opportunities and challenges beyond K-12, take the necessary steps to become qualified for this next level, and be encouraged and assisted in the process by teachers, counselors, and school leaders. College officials, in turn, will reach out to communities, families, and high school students and make them more aware of the need for and opportunities in higher education. Students will aspire to and enroll in those colleges and universities that maximize their long-term educational and career potentials. While enrolled in college, they will be supported by systems of encouragement and guidance that will maintain them, and steer them to the next levels of education, as desired and appropriate. Those who are enrolled in community colleges will benefit from well-developed, smoothly functioning systems of articulation with 4-year colleges and universities. In fact, the entire pre-K to "grade 18" system will work in an integrated manner, in function if not in structure.*

Given this universal ideal, how do the processes of schooling in this country – informal and formal – fail to meet the needs of Latino children?

**Preschool Educational Experiences.** The early childhood years (0-5) represent a critical period of cognitive, social, and emotional development. An extensive body of research[XI] has documented that if a child's environment provides a rich and challenging menu of experiences during this period, the level of readiness for formal schooling will be significantly enhanced. It is also clear that low income children - Hispanic children among them - do not enter kindergarten with the same toolkit of educational background, are hampered by poorer health, and that the contributing factors are systemic:

- Latino children tend to be less likely to participate in high quality preschool programs, primarily because of a lack of local availability and high cost. Publicly funded, high-quality early childhood education programs are relatively rare, particularly in low-income communities. Thus, either Latino children do not participate in formal preschooling at all, or they participate in programs that are much less effective. That is, they do not have a clear focus on literacy and language skills, have fewer qualified teachers, have limited access to quality books and other materials, and are likely to be poorly organized and managed. In contrast, the ingredients of quality preschooling[XII] are known and the short term and long-term benefits are well documented. With preschool exposure to language, reading, storytelling, modeling of standard English, and working in groups with caring and competent adults, Latino youngsters can enter Kindergarten better able to handle formal schooling. They will have the necessary skills to learn at a fast rate, become even better readers, follow directions, work independently, and express their needs. Moreover, existing research indicates that high quality preschool can have benefits that extend throughout the school years and on into adulthood.

- Hispanic families, particularly those with lower-incomes, tend to have inconsistent access to quality health care, and tend not to be covered by health insurance,[XIII] often as a function of the nature of their employers. To the extent that the health and nutritional needs of Hispanic children, both physical and socio-emotional, are not fully met, this will have repercussions on cognitive and social development at school entry. It is hard for sick or hungry kids to learn, and these systemic deficits will have impacts on children throughout the early school years. For example, Latino and other minority children are much more likely to be referred to special education programs in the early years of school, an outcome that is doubtless exacerbated in turn by low expectations about abilities.

**Time Devoted to Learning.** One of the more consistent predictors of educational outcomes is the sheer amount of "seat time" on the part of a student who is engaged in challenging, active, consistent instruction and learning.[XIV] There are several ways that Hispanic students are shortchanged – or shortchange themselves – on this factor of time on task.

- The most obvious way of reducing instructional time is to have poor school attendance. This is a significant problem among Hispanics, particularly in lower income families and neighborhoods. While not quantifiable, attendance problems are also related to school environments that are less challenging.
- Over the entire K-12 years, Hispanic students tend to drop out of school[XV] at a higher rate than other groups. In inner city and low-income suburbs, dropout rates in the thirty to forty percent range for Hispanics are not uncommon. Once gone from formal schooling, instructional time (except job-related training, GED classes, or other miscellaneous educational experiences) drops precipitously.
- Hispanic students are much more likely to transfer schools and school districts, particularly as their parents pursue employment opportunities. Many working class Latino parents are renters and many of their employment opportunities are short-lived. They move a lot. As a result, their children change schools more often, and the net effect is to lose instructional days or educational continuity between the old and new schools. Most school systems, in turn, have not learned how to accommodate a mobile student population in terms of keeping track and maintaining educational engagement. (One apparent exception to this general rule: schools for dependents on military bases.) A more uniform approach to educational standards and aligned curriculum, across schools and school districts, would help.
- While not specific to Hispanic students, schools differ widely in the extent to which they effectively manage the school day. Some schools are poorly organized in this regard, and students waste their days in activities and diversions unrelated to instruction. There are "best practices" in this regard (see below).
- The de facto time spent on learning for the individual student is degraded by high student-to-teacher ratios. Conversely, reducing those ratios can positively impact learning outcomes. This is particularly effective in the lower elementary grades, but unfortunately not widely implemented across the country.

**Maximizing Intellectual Rigor.** While maximizing time-on-task (see above) is great, time spent on challenging educational tasks is even better. The overall intellectual rigor of the K-12 curriculum is one of the most consistent predictors of future educational attainment and achievement.[XVI] There are several discouraging findings in this area pertaining to Hispanics:

- Hispanic students are less likely to enroll in college prep classes, or to participate in AP classes[XVII] and assessment. In effect, they are not challenged.
- The parents of Hispanic high school students – particularly those with less income or educational background themselves – are less likely to be aware[XVIII] of more rigorous educational curricula that are available for their children and essential for college admission. There needs to be much more effective informational outreach to Latino parents on these critical academic choices.
- In many high schools, the youth culture itself tends to discourage taking and achieving in rigorous classes, particularly math and the sciences. This may be seen as being a "geek" or other more colorful name. Unfortunately, as a result Hispanic students may bypass opportunities to take advanced courses in math, computers, or other difficult and college-relevant areas, and thus reduce future opportunities in remunerative career paths. Again, more Hispanic parents and students need to know more about the implications of academic choices.
- Hispanic students are less likely to participate in academic enrichment activities that occur after school or during the summer.
- Properly used, testing is an important tool for maximizing intellectual rigor and educational outcomes. Testing should be used a vehicle for assessing how much "mastery" a student (or a school) has gained over instructional content and objectives that are being addressed by teachers. A good teacher uses tests frequently, as it is the fairest way to diagnose learning accomplishments and instructional needs in students. Testing can also be used to compare achievement across schools or districts, and among different categories of students.

**Better-Prepared Teachers Teach Better.** Common sense and research results indicate that some teachers are better prepared than others, both in general as well as in reaching students who might be challenged by language skills or prior educational background. This fact plays itself out in a particularly invidious manner in the school and classroom:

- Schools that serve a high percentage of minority students or students from lower SES families tend to have teachers that are less experienced, less qualified in the content areas that they are teaching (e.g., math teachers without math coursework), or not among the ranks of master teachers in a district.
- Incentives to bring more qualified teachers to schools in need are inconsistently available or applied.
- A wise human resource manager in industry will try to observe the practice of being slow and deliberate in hiring decisions, and quick in rectifying hiring decisions that do not work out. This is difficult to do in schools. Teacher shortages and pressures for class size reduction both create incentives for schools to move quickly on hiring processes. Unfortunately, it is an administratively

difficult and lengthy process for school systems to remove or transfer teachers who are still not working out, despite significant efforts in professional development and mentoring.

- In comparison with other career tracks with similar levels of educational requirements, salary levels in education are generally lower, which functions as a deterrent for talented young people to major in the field.
- Hispanic-serving schools tend to have a large number of second language learners, but not a commensurate number of teachers are skilled in ESL/bilingual techniques. Increasing the quality and quantity of ESL teachers is an absolutely critical component in bridging educational gaps for Latino students.
- Teacher licensure or teaching credentials are not equivalent to teaching competency. The former are often tied to the completion of teaching methods courses offered by colleges of education, some of which are of debatable value. This works against adding to teaching ranks individuals with deep content expertise from a prior career. In addition the preparation of culturally sensitive teachers should be a priority, as some colleges of education propagate a "victimization" ideology, which depicts Latino families and students as little more than pawns of a hostile society[XIX]. Teacher education, and how colleges and universities can be effectively "engaged"[XX] with Hispanic communities, needs much more attention on the part of postsecondary leadership. At the same time, alternative routes to teacher certification must assure that highly qualified individuals are placed in schools.

**Learning Resources and Stuff that Works.** In order to have comparable educational outcomes, schools should have roughly comparable and adequate educational resources, no matter the demographics of their student body or the neighborhood where they are located. Too often this is not the case. Learning resources include the traditional tools of education (e.g., books, buildings, labs, and materials), and increasingly important is access to the newer tools of education (e.g., computers, the Internet, and the changing technologies of learning). In addition to changes in the underlying technologies of education, a large body of research has been conducted in order to define "what works" in terms of curricular packages or educational practices. This body of research is encouraging and heartening[XXI], in that it points to clear statistical relationships between the use of certain programs, policies, and educational practices and significant improvements in Hispanic children's educational performance. If more Hispanic-serving school adopted these practices and programs, much could be accomplished in terms of educational gap closing. Unfortunately, the results of this research activity rarely get into the hands of teachers and building administrators serving Hispanics, particularly those from lower income communities. While great strides have been made in recent years through various allocation policies targeting resource equity and resource quality, the problem still persists and negatively affects Hispanic students:

- The effective use of learning technologies can be an important "gap closer," and recent research[XXII] summarizing the experience of the last several years indicates that computer-based instruction will help students learn more, help students learn faster, and increase student positive attitudes toward instruction and the use of

computers. However, "effective use" is often gated in two ways. For one, insufficient support may be earmarked for staff training and development in the use of technology. In other words, allocations for hardware are often easier to pull off than allocations for the "soft side" of technology utilization, although the latter is vital[XXIII]. Second, even as school-based technology equity issues are resolved there are lingering issues of the home-based digital divide. Students can make effective use of computers and the Internet at home only if these are available at home. While this goes beyond the normal domain of educational programming, it clearly impacts the ability of schools to effectively utilize learning technologies.

- Few districts - much less schools- have either the capacity or the will to sort out on the basis of demonstrable effectiveness different approaches to teaching and learning. Too often these decisions are made on the basis of politics and educational ideology (e.g., the role of structured, phonics-based approaches to reading instruction vs. the role of sight reading) as opposed to hard data. While there is a growing, practical, and research-based body of studies on what works educationally for Hispanic children (noted above), too often that does not reach into Hispanic-serving schools.

**Social Organization of Schools.** There are hundreds of schools nationally that work for low income and minority children, and that are competitive by any standards. That is, they look as good as the top tiers of schools in their states on objective measures of achievement despite having what cynical observers might see as the "burden" of working with students from minority or low SES backgrounds. These are schools that do the job of teaching and challenging their students, and there is a longstanding literature defining their characteristics. They tend[XXIV] to have a highly structured, teacher-centered (in the vernacular) approach to instruction that is focused on student learning outcomes rather than the nuances of process. Some of those characteristics include:

- A principal whose role is to function as an instructional leader rather than an administrator, and who visibly takes on the mission of bringing educational excellence to all children. Unfortunately, the incentives of school systems often work the other direction.
- A mission that encompasses reaching and challenging every child, no matter from what socio-economic background. Unfortunately, too often the rhetoric of educational philosophy or programming makes low expectations a norm.
- A disciplined, structured approach to learning materials and methods, an emphasis on maximizing "time on task" and minimizing unfocused activities, and a reliance on curricular approaches that demonstrably work. Unfortunately, there are strong currents in the educational field that makes ignoring data-based reform, buying into educational fads, and not challenging students, acceptable ways of doing business.

There are many important aspects of the social organization of the school that are not routinely observed in practice but whose positive impacts are well documented in the

research literature on "effective schools". The point is that in addition to looking at the microstructure of educational practice (e.g., this reading program versus another), we can also define the structural and organizational characteristics of schools that work, and replicate what they are doing in other settings. We can also shine the spotlight of positive acclaim on their accomplishments.

**Academic Choices and Transitions.** As described above, K-16 education is not one system but a multi-layered set of organizations that are at best loosely connected. As Latino children and families transition through this non-system, they are constantly confronted with academic choices (e.g., whether to take this curriculum or course, or another). These periods of academic choices are typically more intense at the "seams" between different levels of schooling, such as when a child moves from middle school to high school, or from high school to college. While this fragmented system affects students of all races and ethnicities, it is often particularly difficult for Latino parents because of language issues and unfamiliarity with the US educational system among 1st generation parents. When Latino families do not make the educationally optimal academic choices, they tend to cut off future options. For example:

- Too few Hispanic high school graduates move on to college because of choices made during the previous four years in terms of course-taking, getting good grades, and staying focused on school. At the same time, there is growing evidence[XXV] that early attention to these issues can increase the rate of college attendance.
- Popular biases notwithstanding, there are still a large number of career ladders and vocational options that do not demand a four year college degree, but which do involve an academically rigorous high school curriculum followed by a two-year technical degree and/or certification short courses. These tend to be decent-paying jobs in areas such as nursing, computer systems administration, advanced manufacturing, and the like. Unfortunately, not enough high school counselors – or other individuals who advice Hispanic youth – are familiar with these career paths and the requisite training and education.
- Too many Hispanic students who do go on to college "undershoot" their matriculation goals. For example, recent analysis [XXVI] indicates that among students who complete a bachelor's degree in science and engineering, Latinos are more likely to receive that degree from a less research-intensive school. While this can be an excellent choice if the BS is expected to be the terminal degree, it can reduce their chances of moving on to Ph.D.-level training. Academic choices have consequences and many parents and students may not have enough information to evaluate alternatives.
- For a variety of economic and social reasons, community colleges are a very popular postsecondary choice among Latino students. Unfortunately, the data on their finishing a four-year degree and successful transitioning to more advanced postsecondary education is not encouraging. Weak or ambiguous articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year colleges remains a particularly bothersome problem, and too often students lose academic credits during the transition process or leave postsecondary education in discouragement.

This is despite the fact that some states are making significant progress[XXVII] in improving transfer rates.

- Transitioning to college is made doubly hard for undocumented Hispanic students, who are typically excluded from financial aid as well as in-state tuition rates.

**Enabling Hispanic Parents.** The most important "secret weapon" in addressing shortcomings in Hispanic educational attainment and achievement is unfortunately largely underutilized. The integrity, self-reliance, and closeness of the Hispanic family are among the greatest assets that it brings to the problem of educational improvement. Among values that characterize Hispanics cultures are those of hard work, self-improvement, and respect for learning. Too often, however, these strengths of the Hispanic family are frustrated or ignored by schools and school systems:

- The overwhelming majority[XXVIII] of Latino parents expect their child to attend college, but relatively few understand the basic choices and tasks that need to be addressed (e.g., signing up for the SAT, taking AP classes) as their child moves through the educational process. What is needed is a much larger and more effective information outreach effort on the part of K-12 schools, colleges, and community groups to close these information gaps.
- Latino parents need to be more knowledgeable about what it means to be "school ready," and what their role needs to be in the home in terms of providing study space, materials, encouragement and support of homework, and exposure to English.
- While educational accountability is a strong theme in recent educational policies and programs, the implementation thereof gets frustrated for Hispanic parents. Accountability can only work if parents understand expectation and have meaningful interaction with teachers and school officials. This is hampered if school officials cannot bridge language gaps, and accommodate to the schedules of two-earner working class families. For example, there is a growing development at the school level to have interactive web sites via which parents can learn about school activities, their child's progress, and communicate with teachers and staff. Unfortunately, many parents are shut out of these communication utilities, either because of a persisting "digital divide" of home-based Internet access, or the fact that many of these web sites are not in Spanish.
- Communication with and listening to Hispanic parents can only occur with significant effort. This implies routine, clear, and truthful messages going out – through a variety of media and modes – and receptivity to messages and inquiries coming into the school system. Too often schools do not generally see parents as "customers," or if they try, Hispanic parents are not on the preferred short list.

## Decreasing Educational Gaps for Latino Children and Youth: Educational Change Strategies: Recommended Actions and Policies

Ignoring for now whether ameliorative strategies fall into the bailiwick of federal educational agencies, state departments of education, local districts, or individual schools, what are the things that need to done? In what follows, we will provide several action recommendations, corresponding state legislative actions that might follow, and information regarding where No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provisions intersect with our recommendations.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) represents comprehensive federal efforts to support elementary and secondary education in the United States. Broadly, it mandates changes in four key areas: accountability, local flexibility with federal grants, more choice for parents of children from low-income communities, and a strong emphasis on teaching methods and programming supported by scientifically based research.

Wherever possible, NCLB requires policy to address the four key areas mentioned above. However, NCLB often gives states the creative license to develop guidelines to meet the federal requirement, thus providing state legislators great opportunity to affect the nature of said policies in their respective states.

Below, next to the each policy recommendation, you will find relevant NCLB policies that may assist legislators in promoting/developing educational programming that can assist with Hispanic academic success.

(US Department of Education, Office of the Undersecretary, No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference, September 2002)

### Solving the Problems of Preschool Educational Experiences

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Increase access to publicly-funded, quality preschool education programs
- Increase the quality and adherence to "best practices" of preschool programs, particularly approaches that focus on developing pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, social development, and motor skills, as well as culturally responsive instructional activities that cater to the needs of Hispanic children and English language learners
- Reduce language, cultural, and financial obstacles to families' participation in health and preschool programs
- Increase Hispanic families' awareness of and involvement in community health programs as well as what constitutes a high quality preschool program

***Policy Recommendations: Preschool Education.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Increase financial support for high quality preschool programs with school readiness standards and linkages to K-12
- Guarantee every child full-day kindergarten
- Implement a rigorous licensing and accreditation system for preschool programs that promote universal adoption of accepted levels of quality
- Promote and develop high levels of training, formal education, professional development, and compensation of preschool teachers and staff
- Ensure that all states with significant Latino populations have universal publicly funded preschool education programs available for low income and working parents
- Increase financial support for community health programs affecting children, and Latino participation therein

No Child Left Behind Relevant Policy Levers

**Early Reading First, Title 1**
Prepares children to enter kindergarten with language, cognitive, and early reading skills necessary for reading success by strengthening the literacy component of existing childhood centers (grantees must support development of phonemic awareness, oral language, print awareness, and letter knowledge).

**Early Childhood Educator Professional Development, Title II**
Improves the skills of early childhood educators who work with high concentrations of children living in poverty through training and professional development that supports developmentally appropriate school readiness services (specifically targets educators who work with children with Limited English Proficiency [LEP]).

**Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students, Title III**
Assists school districts in teaching LEP students English by requiring that teachers who serve LEP students be fluent in English and any language used by the program. Requires high quality professional development for school personnel and establishment of annual achievement objectives for LEP students.

**Foreign Language Assistance, Title V**
Improves the quality and extent of foreign language instruction, especially in elementary school, through the development of innovative model programs to establish, improve or expand foreign language study.

**Solving the Problem of Effective Learning Time**

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Increase the use of effective programs to reduce school absenteeism, truancy and tardiness of Hispanics, particularly making school more challenging and meaningful for students. Make this a benchmark measure in the evaluation of schools.
- Increase the use of effective programs to reduce school dropouts by Hispanic students, particularly making school more challenging and meaningful for students. Make this a benchmark measure in the evaluation of schools, and strive for a standard approach to the computation of dropout statistics.
- Develop and implement statewide procedures for transitioning students from one school to another across district lines. This would include computerized state databases on each student as mandated by No Child Left Behind.
- Increase the use of effective school management approaches to maximize time-on-task in the classroom (e.g., "outlawing" non-instructional interruptions).
- Starting in the lower elementary grades make substantial changes in student-to-teacher ratios, albeit staying close to the emerging data in terms of where it makes sense to increase staffing versus where such expenditures may have negligible impact.

***Policy Recommendations: Increased Effective Learning Time.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Increase support for programs, and implementation of established best practices, that reduce dropout rates, absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness
- Implement class size reduction in lower elementary grades, consistent with current research and best practices
- Establish statewide databases with unique student identification numbers so as to more effectively track inter-district transfer

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**School Dropout Prevention, Title I**

Assists schools with dropout rates above the state average to implement effective dropout prevention and re-entry programs.

**Education of Migratory Children, Title I**

Aims to reduce educational disruptions and other problems that result from repeated moves, and to reduce educational disparities due to interstate migration. Establishes an electronic national information system to transfer health and educational information for children in the Migrant Education Program. Requires student progress to be explained to parents in a language they understand.

**Smaller Learning Communities, Title V**

Encourages the creation of smaller learning communities within large high schools, such as academies, houses, and schools-within-a- school etc.

**Solving the Problem of Maximizing Intellectual Rigor**

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Make Hispanic parents more aware of the importance of more challenging coursework and curricula (e.g., AP classes, college prep), and the opportunities afforded by postsecondary education
- Eliminate differences in curricular offering across schools that are primarily a function of the ethnicity and economic status of the student body and community
- Increase opportunities for Hispanic students to participate in extracurricular and summer academic enrichment programs, and enlist colleges, corporations, and community organizations in this effort
- Increase the alignment between demanding assessment (end-of-year tests) and demanding curriculum in which most or all students participate
- Make sure that parents and students know and understand – early in their school career - the relationship between taking a demanding curriculum and getting into the better colleges
- Use testing and assessment in ways that it is an instructional tool in the classroom and at the school level, and a way of fostering school reform at district and state levels. Learn what tests can do well as well as their potential shortcomings[XXIX], and work to maximize the former and minimize the latter. Make parents aware of "high stakes testing," in which a single test assumes an overarching role in decisions about promotion, retention, and graduation. Avoid the mindless practice of "teaching to the test."

***Policy Recommendations: Increased Academic Rigor.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Make the default high school curriculum one encompassing academic rigorous coursework
- Equalize opportunities across schools in access to AP classes and other academic enrichment programs and explore the feasibility of utilizing distance learning techniques to address these issues
- Enhance the intelligent use of testing and assessment that ties the process to instructional objectives, and enables the identification of exemplary schools, programs, and approaches
- Make English language proficiency a component of state performance assessment at every grade level

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**Advanced Placement. Title I**

Aims to increase the number of low-income students participating in AP classes and taking AP tests, through teacher training, developing pre- and AP courses, coordinating inter-grade curricula, and promoting online AP course-taking.

**21st Century Community Learning Centers, Title IV**

Provides academic enrichment services during non-school hours or periods, to students and families at low-performing schools. May integrate activities such as recreation, the arts, drug prevention, and literacy services for parents.

## Solving the Problem of Teacher Preparation

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Increase teacher salary levels generally, but also provide more incentives and bonus opportunities to reward exemplary teaching, particularly in low performing schools
- Increase financial and career incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness, signing bonuses, tuition payments for graduate training) for high quality teachers (including master teachers and National Board Certified teachers) to work in schools with high percentages of minority and/or lower income students
- Increase the administrative flexibility for discharging, or re-deploying to non-teaching assignments, those teachers who are not working out in terms of classroom effectiveness
- Act aggressively to improve pre and in-service training programs, and establish strong recruitment, induction, and retention policies. Implement quality mentoring and professional development programs that are in turn closely aligned with instructional standards and curricula.
- Make non-traditional routes to a teaching career easier to follow, particularly for mature individuals with exemplary careers in other fields. At the same time, ensure that alternative certification includes appropriate and necessary licensing tests, pre-employment pedagogical training, and ongoing professional development and mentoring.

***Policy Recommendations: Teacher Preparation.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Reduce the disparity across schools in the quality, experience, credentials, and professional training of teaching staff
- Elevate the quality, experience, credentials, and professional training of teaching staff
- Create financial structures that support and reward teaching excellence

- Revamp professional training programs to increase the number of bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**Advanced Certification or Advanced Credentialing, Title II**

Supports high quality professional programs designed to improve teaching and learning. Awards grants to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Council on Teacher Quality and other recognized certification or credentialing organizations.

**Troops-to-Teachers, Title II**

Encourages former military personnel to become classroom teachers in high need schools. Administered by the US Department of Defense. Provides support and financial services to former military personnel interested in becoming teachers.

**Teacher and Principal Training and Recruitment Fund, Grant to States, Title II**

Aims to increase student achievement by elevating teacher and principal quality through recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies. Most funding is awarded to local school districts and schools but some will go to schools of teacher preparation within institutions of higher education. States may develop innovative teacher pay systems. Requires schools to assess progress of ensuring that all teachers are "highly qualified," and requires all paraprofessionals to complete two years of higher education or meet rigorous standard of quality.

**Ready to Teach, Title V**

Aims to develop national telecommunications-based programming, such as professional development on student assessment tools, to improve teaching in core-curriculum areas. Awards competitive grants to nonprofit telecommunications organizations or a partnership of such organizations.

**Transition to Teaching, Title II**

Aims to recruit and retain highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent college graduates as teachers in high-need schools. Also supports the development and expansion of alternative routes to initial teacher certification.

## Solving the Problem of Learning Resources

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Increase the widespread dissemination of proven (data-based) approaches to increasing educational outcomes, including ongoing professional development - that is proven effective - for participating schools and staff, and financial incentives to be innovative. Too much that passes for "professional development" involves one-shot presentations and meetings that have little linkage to implementing.
- Dramatically increase the planning and staff training necessary to integrate computers, the Internet, and related technologies into more widespread and effective classroom use, across all subjects

- Eliminate the digital divide experienced by Hispanic parents and families by establishing as a national goal that every family with a school-aged child has home-based, high speed access to the Internet

***Policy Recommendations: Learning Resources.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Increase the use of proven (data-based) approaches – programs and practices - to increasing educational outcomes by appropriate language in authorization and appropriation bills, by legislative oversight, and by being a visible advocate for educational innovation
- Achieves parity across all schools in the concentration of learning technology, and the capacities of instructional staff to use it (including computer competency as an element of teacher education and credentialing)
- Eliminate the digital divide experienced by Hispanic parents and families, including the promotion of accessible venues in libraries, communities, and other public facilities, as well as consideration of statewide or district-wide experiments in increasing the home-based availability of computers and Internet access

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**Enhancing Education Through Technology, Title II**

Aims to improve student academic achievement through the use of technology in elementary and secondary schools. Assist students in becoming technologically literate by the end of eighth grade. Funds high quality professional development, increased access to technology, integration of technology into curricula, the use of technology to promote parental involvement and the management of data for informed decision making.

## Solving the Problem of the Social Organization of Schools

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Increase the dissemination and implementation of the practical lessons of "outlier schools" or schools that work
- Increase the quality, training, and reward systems of building-level administrators throughout the educational system, and make them accountable for the educational performance of their schools
- Make practices and programs "that work" a watchword of school-level management and goals, and increase district and school level capacities to be aware of emerging research knowledge on effective programs and practices, and to implement those lessons
- Ensure that the teachers and leaders of schools which serve Hispanic children should be knowledgeable, understanding, and respectful about the culture, history, and language of the various Latino communities in their respective districts

***Policy Recommendations: School Organization.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Increase the quality, training, and reward systems of building-level administrators throughout the educational system, and make them accountable for the educational performance of their schools, and the use of educational programs that work

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**School Leadership, Title II**
Aims to create a high-quality school leadership force by providing training and continuing professional development to principals and assistant principals. Calls for financial incentives for aspiring new principals, a stipend for principals who mentor new principals, professional development for instructional leadership and management, and effective incentives for the recruitment and retention of individuals in other fields who want to become principals.

## Doing Better at Academic Choices and Transitions

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Strengthen counseling and advice to Latino students and their parents as they confront key academic choice points (e.g., entering high school, contemplating college)
- Expose Latino high school students to the whole range of vocational and career options, including those well-paying jobs that do not demand a four-year college degree
- Emulate on a wider basis the lessons learned from colleges that do well at smoothing the transition between community colleges and four-year schools.
- Enable more Latino college students to be qualified – in terms of grades and course taking – to make the transition to graduate training or professional schools.

***Policy Recommendations: Academic Choices and Transitions.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Strengthen college planning, information dissemination, and career development guidance earlier in the high school years, and build reward systems for schools to increase their postsecondary enrollment.
- Adopts a systemic, comprehensive, and lessons-incorporating approach to increasing the transfer rates between community colleges and baccalaureate institutions, and build reward systems for colleges to increase their transfer rates
- Encourage state Congressional delegations to pass the DREAM Act, which would enable states to relax current prohibitions on in-state tuition and financial aid for undocumented students

**Solving the Problem of Enabling and Energizing Hispanic Parents**

The following action recommendations should be considered:

- Dramatically increase the outreach role to Hispanic parents and communities being played by K-12 schools at all levels, as well as by colleges and universities, so that they can be more informed and active education "consumers" for themselves and their children
- Make all communication to and interaction with Hispanic parents sensitive to the language, inter-cultural, and job-related issues that they are confronting on a daily basis
- Significantly increase the knowledge of Hispanic parents on how the educational system works, the choice options at all levels, and the career and life options afforded by different post-secondary programs and settings
- Address divergent expectations that Hispanic parents may have for their male vs. female children, including the value of attending a top rank college away from home

***Policy Recommendations: Enabling Hispanic Parents.*** NHCSL members should support policies that:

- Increase the number of bilingual counseling and administrative staff
- Increase the quality and extent of outreach to Hispanic parents and communities
- Make communication with Hispanic parents sensitive to issues of language, culture, and socio-economic condition
- Increase the knowledge of Hispanic parents on how the educational system works

No Child Left Behind Policy Levers

**Parental Assistance Information Centers, Title V**

Aims to implement parental involvement strategies that lead to improvements in student academic achievement by establishing school-linked or school-based parental information and resource centers. Will provide training, information and support for parents, and individuals or organizations that work with parents.

**William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program, Title I**

Aims to break cycle of poverty and illiteracy for low-income families by providing integrated literacy activities for parents and their young children (birth through age 7) through adult education, early childhood education, parenting education and interactive literacy activities.

## General Policy Recommendations

This last section covers a number of potential policy actions that are larger in scope and context than those just described, that are more issue-specific. These include actions that NHCSL might take as an organization, as well as policy-relevant activities that might be taken by individual members, that go beyond fairly narrow educational issues.

### Recommendations for NHCSL Itself

In addition to the concerns and issues that are critical in NHCSL members' states, there are a number of actions that NHCSL itself might consider, as follows:

***Policy Recommendation: NHCSL should explore the feasibility of serving as a state educational clearinghouse on Hispanic educational policy.*** On a more systematic basis, NHCSL should also consider serving as a national clearinghouse on state legislation affecting Hispanic students. Model legislation, such as legislation allowing in-state tuition for children of undocumented parents, merit pay for bilingual teachers, new developments in language acquisition programs, can all be disseminated by NHCSL's legislative membership. Standard approaches to measuring outcomes and performance (e.g., dropout statistics) could also be promoted. Various dissemination approaches could be used concurrently – the Internet, distribution of hard copy materials, period regional briefings – in order to maximize connectivity to legislators and legislative staff.

***Policy Recommendation: NHCSL should foster inter-state consortia approaches to educational improvement.*** Many of the specific recommendations discussed above would demand the establishment or significant improvement of state-level functions or activities. If each state follows these recommendations on its own, this will result in a situation in which several states will be "reinventing the wheel." In reality, many of the new functions, activities, and reforms could be addressed in a consortia manner, brokered by NHCSL. For example, the identification and dissemination of "best practices" in Hispanic education holds great promise for improving educational practice, and the process need not be replicated in dozens of states. Some sort of an inter-state council on Hispanic educational improvement, with a limited staff function but with significant involvement on the part of educational and community leaders, might be useful.

### Related Policy Activities by NHSCL Members

In addition to energizing the attention and action of NHCSL as an organization, there are other larger policy issues that need to be pursued in each state legislature. The nation as a whole needs to re-prioritize its fiscal and programmatic commitment to quality education generally, and to mounting a special effort to close the educational gap for Hispanics. While a federal policy framework has been established by the No Child Left Behind legislation, much needs to be done to see the vision and goals of that initiative implemented in the states. The year 2003 marks the first year that the US will spend more on the criminal justice system than it does for education. Moreover, these spending priorities weigh heavily on Latinos. The states with the highest number of

Hispanic students have some of the lowest per capita expenditures on education . This is all the more significant when we consider that two thirds of students of Mexican origin are educated in just two states (California and Texas); half of Puerto Rican origin students in the mainland are being educated in three states (New York, New Jersey and Florida); over half of Central American origin students are being educated in three states (California, Florida and New York) and the great majority of Cuban origin students are educated in Florida.

***Policy Recommendation: NHCSL members should be proponents of maintaining and possibly increasing educational funding in state budgets.*** In a time of fiscal retrenchment education budgets should be among the last to be considered for reductions. In addition, those state legislators in states below the national norm in per capita spending on education should be forceful advocates for bringing educational spending to national levels. This report does not underestimate the magnitude of the costs involved. For example, to bring California, Florida and Texas to national average per capita education spending would require each state to increase their education budgets by two to three billion dollars per year. Within the present fiscal circumstances this is not likely in the near term. A long-term strategy needs to be developed including a timetable for attaining funding parity. To this end, blue ribbon commissions should be established on alternate funding programs for state supported education programs.

***Policy Recommendation: NHCSL members should be visible and forceful advocates of a wise implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative.*** While NCLB has established a policy framework and ambitious expectations, its effective implementation is far from assured. In particular, federal budget resources need to be commensurate with NCLB programmatic objectives. In this document we have pointed out where NCLB provisions intersect with our recommendations. Nonetheless, NHCSL members need to be active stewards of how NCLB is being rolled out in their states, how educational agencies are participating, and in particular how it is impacting Hispanic schools, communities, and children. While there are great potentials for positive change in NCLB, there are also many opportunities for negative or uncertain impacts. Among these, the potential for misuse of the testing and assessment features of the program is considerable, and could be exacerbated by shortfalls in program resources allocated by the federal government to the states.

***Policy Recommendation: NHCSL members should use the "bully pulpit" of their office to promote quality education among their constituents.*** Beyond their formal responsibilities as legislators, NHCSL members occupy a unique role as civic leaders in the Hispanic community. Survey after survey indicates that Latino elected officials are respected opinion leaders. Through activities such as town hall meetings, newsletters, public service announcements, and speeches, Latino legislators need to be visible, consistent, and credible sources of information on the importance of education, the problems that must be faced to improve attainment and achievement, and solutions that can be implemented locally and state wide.

***Policy Recommendation: Latino state legislators should bring attention to recognized "schools of excellence" in their areas that serve large numbers of Latino and lower income students.*** This report has repeatedly mentioned that schools should incorporate proven "best practices" to improve the learning of Latino students. In fact, through various regional[XXX] and national[XXXI] studies, hundreds of schools are being identified that serve minorities and low come student, and also place in the top tier of their state's educational performance statistics. Often the excellence of these schools, and the lessons that can learn from these exemplars, goes unnoticed. Legislators can perform a significant service by highlighting the principals and teachers who work in these schools, and the practices that make these schools excel in teaching Latino students.
Paralleling these national and regional analyses, legislators should work to insure that performance statistics within school districts should be disaggregated to the individual school level so as to enable identification of schools of excellence (the "exemplars").

No Child Left Behind: Policy Levers

**Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies, Title 1**
Title I requires the creation of mechanisms to hold states, school districts, and schools accountable for improving academic achievement of all students.

Generally, it requires the use of scientifically proven effective teaching methods, measures by which to evaluate whether teachers are "highly qualified, " strengthens corrective actions and restructuring for schools that persistently fail, strengthens paraprofessional eligibility, requires annual assessments in grades 3-8, creation of state and local report cards, the implementation of a single statewide accountability system, and various school choice options for children who attend schools that continually fail.

The **General Provisions** also call for annual state reports on dropout rates, disaggregated by race and ethnicity and annual General Accounting Office audits of at least six Title 1 districts to examine the extent to which funds were used for instructional and non-instructional purposes.

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