

GAINING GROUND

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS



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GAINING GROUND NEWSLETTER

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Latino Students and Secondary School Education¹

Julia Lara and Gitanjali Pande

Several trends have raised the public's concern regarding the quality of education at the secondary school level. Foremost is the recognition that the economic well being of the nation is threatened by an undereducated workforce. Recent reports indicate that most of today's high school students are ill prepared for the challenges that await them in postsecondary institutions or the workplace. While American high school students have made gains on national and international tests over the last decade; they are not sufficient to meet the requirements of tomorrow's economy.² Changes in the workplace have resulted in increased demand for highly skilled labor and decreased demand for unskilled labor. For students to succeed in this competitive

¹ The terms Hispanic and Latino will be used interchangeably in this article.

² American Youth Policy Forum. *High Schools of the Millennium*. Report of the Workgroup. August 2000.

Education Trust. *Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond*. 2000.

economic environment, they must have strong oral and written communication skills and a mastery of mathematics. In addition, they must have problem solving skills and be able to adapt to rapidly developing technology.

While the demand for a highly skilled work force has increased, several reports have highlighted the poor performance of high school students on several indicators of academic achievement. Education Trust reported that today's American 17 year-olds are making less progress in reading, math, and science during their high school years than did their earlier counterparts and 30% of high school graduates who entered college needed to take a remedial course in basic subjects like English and mathematics.

Moreover, the achievement gap between white and minority students is widening. Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that African American and Latino 17 year olds have reading and math skills equal to eighth grade white students.³ African American and Latino students are also much more likely to drop out of school. In 1998, the dropout

³ Education Trust. 2000.

rate for white students was eight percent, 14 percent for African American students, and 30 percent for Latino students.⁴

This article will focus on the academic status of Latino students at the high school level. In recent weeks several major newspaper articles have been reporting the results of the Census 2000 count.

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⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*. 1999. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

Of particular interest is the attention given to the growth of the Latino population.⁵ Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population grew by 58 percent and now equals that of blacks, each comprising about 13 percent of the total population. Latinos in grades 9-12 constitute 13% of the school population and by 2030 they are expected to comprise 23% of the population.⁶ The implication of the Latino student growth is more clearly evident in large urban school districts where most Latino students are concentrated. For example, Hispanic students represent 31% of all students enrolled in the Council of Great City Schools member districts. These are the districts with the highest student enrollment in the nation.

Not only do Latino students have one of the highest dropout rates, but they perform less well than their peers on several indices of academic achievement. For example, on the 1998 NAEP reading test only 24% of Latino 17 year olds scored at the "proficient" level versus 40% of white students. In mathematics, six percent of Latino students scored at the proficient level, while 18% of white adolescents scored at this level. In addition, Latino students are underrepresented on AP exams and tend to score lower than their white and Asian peers. These demographic shifts and performance indicators mean that the future work force will be more diverse and increasingly comprised of the very students that are now

⁵ People of Hispanic origin can be of any race. In addition, they comprised of a diverse group of people originating from the various countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and US born people of Hispanic descent.

⁶ ERIC Digest. February 2001

disproportionately enrolled in under performing schools.

Factors that Influence the Achievement of Latino Students at the High School Level

Several factors influence the performance of Latino students at both the elementary and secondary school level including poverty status, English language proficiency, type of school attended, and racial/ethnic bias as reflected in interactions with the broader school community.⁷ Of particular importance to educators and policymakers, are those factors over which they have some level of influence or control. These are summarized below.

Type of School and Quality of Teaching

Hispanic students are concentrated in resource poor schools characterized by high mobility rates, high turnover in teaching staff, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate instructional resources particularly for those students who are also limited English proficient.

The quality of teaching has been found to have a direct effect on the academic achievement of students. Latino students enrolled in low performing resource poor schools are often taught by teachers who lack deep knowledge of content and are not prepared to teach students

in the process of acquiring English. Various reports have indicated that in schools with large concentrations of poor students, teachers are either inexperienced to work with students with multiple needs or have not kept up with new developments in instructional pedagogy. In addition, mainstream teachers lack understanding of second language development. In 1994, the National Educational Goals Panel found that while 43% of secondary school teachers had limited English proficient (LEP) students in their classrooms, only about half of them received any training on how to teach second language learners (Rong & Prissle, 1998).

In addition, the issue of teacher expectations cannot be underestimated. Researchers have noted that the belief that minority students are less capable of meeting rigorous academic standards influences the type of course work students are given. For example, Hispanic students are often tracked into general courses of study that satisfy only the basic requirements and do not provide a path to four-year college or a rigorous technical school (Creating the Will, 2000). Unfortunately, students internalize this belief and often perform below their capacity. This problem has been observed among both low social economic status (SES) and high SES students.

English Language Proficiency

Most Latino students are not limited English proficient, however, the overwhelming majority of limited English proficient students are Latinos (75%). There are significant numbers of these students who come to school at the middle or high school level and are in need of

⁷ This section of the article summarizes selected findings from two reports: *Reaching the Top: A Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement*. (1999). New York, New York: The College Board. *Creating the Will: Hispanic Achieving Educational Excellence*. (2000). Washington, DC: President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

specialized second language development support in the form of English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education. Most are served through ESL programs and sheltered content instruction in which the strategy for delivering content is modified to make the content more accessible to second language learners. Unfortunately, because native language instruction is not generally provided at the secondary school level, Latino students who are LEP face a difficult challenge in meeting content class expectations and learning English. This is a particularly daunting task for those students with limited schooling in their home language. Several school systems have developed biliteracy programs, which maintain the native language by using it as a means of teaching content while continuing English language instruction.

Interventions that Hold Promise for Increasing Learning Opportunities for Hispanic Students

The research literature on the education of Latino students in secondary schools has identified several common features of best practices that promote the academic success of these students including:

A focus on literacy development across the curriculum.

Profile Approach to Writing (PAW) professional development in creative writing to students from grades 3 to 12 (Fashola et al,

1997).⁸ The program emphasizes a process of drafting and revision of compositions, and makes use of a writing profile to assess and guide student writing performance. The profile is a holistic, analytic scale that assesses content, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics in students' compositions. PAW was not developed for use with Latino students, but has been extensively used and evaluated in schools with many Latino students.

Special in-service awareness sessions that include all members of the school community and focus on the needs and characteristics of secondary Latino students

Communities in Schools Program (CIS) of San Antonio was designed to improve academic success at the high school level and ensure participants enroll and successfully complete postsecondary education. It is a school-based, year-round program providing immediately accessible services to young people and their families facing obstacles to personal or academic success. CIS professionals address students' real-life needs, which, if gone unmet, can often result in students dropping out of school. The program provides enrichment activities, tutoring, counseling, guidance and Saturday classes. CIS-SA provides health and human services referrals, promotes parent and family involvement in the educational process, career awareness, and pre-employment services. Activities address a whole range of issues - character education, poor attendance, academic deficiencies, crisis

situations, gang involvement, health issues, and teen pregnancy. An evaluation report reveals an average annual high school graduation rate of 98%, of which 90% attend college with many receiving financial aid and scholarships. CIS is currently serving 5,000 students and their families in 35 schools, in eight school districts. It also runs pre-college programs in six high schools, serving low-income, first generation college candidates; it has two alternative non-traditional high school academies serving students who might otherwise drop out of school.

Use of teaching strategies that reinforce students' strengths and affirm cultural background

For example, the Calexico High School in Calexico, California, on the southern border of the U.S., has 98% Latino students and 80% ELLs. It operates on a philosophy based on such principles as respect for the students' culture, language and background; a strong belief that all students can learn; and equal opportunities for all students to pursue further education. They have eliminated the tracking system and have high expectations of all students.

Practices underlying the academic success of the school's students are: an efficient system of counseling both within the school system and in coordination with outside agencies, and teaching English but also emphasizing that native language development is essential. Because there is support for continuous development of student's academic skills required courses are taught in Spanish, English, and through sheltered English instruction (Walqui, 2000).

⁸Fashola, Olatokunbo., Slavin, Robert. Promising Programs for Elementary and Middle Schools: Evidence of Effectiveness and Replicability. *Journal of Education for Students at Risk*. 2 (3), 251-307

Extended learning opportunities that provide students with extra time to catch up in learning and content matter and in English language development

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by the Intercultural Development Research Association, is an internationally-recognized dropout prevention program in schools across the U.S., Puerto Rico, Great Britain and Brazil. Since starting in 1984 in San Antonio, this cross-age tutoring program has kept more than 5,500 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. All students are valued and none are expendable - this philosophy gives strength to the program's instructional strategies (classes are student tutors, tutoring sessions, field trips, role modeling, and student recognition) and to its support strategies (curriculum, coordination, staff enrichment, parent involvement and program evaluation. The key to the program's success is in valuing students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school and sustaining their efforts with effective, coordinated strategies. This program, over the course of 15 years, has made a visible difference to lives of over 74,500 families, children and educators.

Latinos in Higher Education

Cynthia Reeves

Latinos currently represent about 10 percent of the total student enrollment in higher education and this proportion is expected to increase to 22 percent by 2025. By 2006, Hispanics will outnumber African American college students to become the largest college-

going minority and will account for one in six undergraduates.⁹

Although the numbers of Latino students enrolled in colleges and universities is increasing dramatically, they still lag far behind other groups in educational attainment. Between 1976 and 1996, the numbers of Latinos enrolled in undergraduate institutions increased by 202 percent, compared to only 13 percent for whites and 44 percent for blacks. Yet, Latinos still enroll in college at lower rates than whites and blacks. In 1998, 93.6 percent of white students graduated from high school and 65.8 percent of graduates enrolled in college; 88.2 percent of blacks graduated from high school and 62.1 percent of graduates enrolled in college; and 62.8 percent of Hispanic students graduated from high school and only 47.5 percent of graduates enrolled in college.¹⁰ In addition, a gap persists between the number of white and minority students who actually graduate from college. Among students enrolled in four-year colleges in 1989-90, 58 percent of white students earned degrees by 1994, compared to 49 percent of Hispanic students.¹¹

Latino students also are more likely to enroll in two-year institutions. In 1995-96, Latinos represented 6.5

percent of students enrolled in research universities and 11.5 percent of students enrolled in Associate of Arts Colleges. While two-year colleges offer many educational opportunities as well as open doors to four-year institutions, many students enrolled in two-year colleges have not been provided with the information and counseling that would prepare them to transfer to four-year institutions. Oftentimes, students are not aware of the courses required or the financial aid available that might help them transfer to four-year institutions.

Latino students are also underrepresented in science, math, and technology based disciplines that are more likely to lead to jobs in growing high-technology industries. The top three disciplines for bachelor's degrees earned by Latinos in 1996 were business, social sciences, and education. For associate's degrees, the top three disciplines were liberal arts, business, and the health professions.¹²

The gap in educational attainment between Latinos and whites can be explained by a number of factors. Most Latino undergraduates are first generation and come from low-income families with parents who have lower levels of education than their non-Latino peers. More importantly, research has indicated that Latino high school graduates are more likely to be marginally qualified or unqualified for admission to four-year colleges - based on high school GPA, senior class rank, SAT or ACT scores, and curricular rigor.¹³ Latino high school students are less likely than

⁹ President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. *Creating the Will: Hispanics Achieving Educational Excellence*. US Department of Education. 2000. http://www.ed.gov/offices/OIA/Hispanic/new/report_v2.pdf

¹⁰ NCES, *The Condition of Education 2000*.

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/coe2000>
NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/Digest99>
¹¹ ETS. *Crossing the Great Divide: Can we Achieve Equity When Generation Y Goes to College?*
www.ets.org

¹² NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1998*.

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=1999036>

¹³ NCES, *The Condition of Education 2000*.

www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/coe2000/

their non-Latino peers to be enrolled in a college-preparatory track – 35 percent of Latinos, compared to 43 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of Whites.¹⁴ These disparities in achievement emerge in the early years of school. NAEP trend data indicates that white students outperform Hispanics in every subject and at every age. By the time Latino students reach high school, large gaps in educational achievement exist between them and their non-Latino peers. In 1999, Latino 17 year-olds scored, on the average, 24 points lower in reading than white students, 22 points lower in math, and 30 points lower in science.¹⁵ Inadequately prepared, many Latino students who graduate from high school will face further challenges in college.

While Latino students are enrolling in colleges and universities at unprecedented rates, many arrive unprepared. They are more likely to require remediation and many will not make it to graduation. Improving levels of educational achievement and attainment for Latino students requires improving their educational experiences *before* they enroll in college. Intervention measures must begin at the elementary level and continue through high school. Programs need to be designed to bring Latino students to levels of achievement on par with other groups. A number of school/university partnerships are focusing on doing just that. These programs are aimed at students from the elementary years on and

¹⁴ Education Trust. *Ticket to Nowhere: The Gap Between Leaving High School and Entering College And High-Performance Jobs.* www.edtrust.org/documents/k16_fall99.pdf

¹⁵ NCES, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1999 Long-term Trend Assessment.

provide comprehensive support systems for students that include a rigorous academic program, test preparation, curriculum advising, tutoring, and mentoring. These programs also provide information to students and parents about the importance of college, the admission process and requirements and the need to perform well academically.

- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), funded by the state of California, provides a rigorous college preparatory program for disadvantaged secondary students and matches them with college students who act as mentors and tutors. AVID provides intensive student support study skills, college student mentor-tutors, test preparation, college information, family involvement, and motivational activities. www.avidcenter.org
- Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), University of California works with students from elementary school on, providing academic enrichment activities, curriculum advising and counseling, mentoring programs, test preparation, and information on college admission, financial assistance, etc. www.ucop.edu.sas.eaop
- The ENLACE Initiative, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Houston Endowment, Inc., supports community-based partnerships in seven states – Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. The partnerships focus on all education levels providing academic support, test preparation, mentoring,

parent involvement, information on college and careers, and internship opportunities. www.wkkfweb.org/ENLACE/map.html

- The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities has joined other national education associations to establish the National Articulation and Transfer Network, designed to increase pre-collegiate retention rates and community college enrollments rates, as well as to encourage the successful transfer of two-year community college students to four-year colleges and universities. The network will be designed to provide students wider college access and a comprehensive support system. www.hacu.net
- The Puente Project works to increase the number of Hispanic students who attend college, earn degrees, and return to the community as mentors and leaders. Puente works with students in high schools and community colleges, providing counseling, mentoring, and improvement of language skills. www.puente.net

Effective Practices for Serving Limited English Proficient Students with Disabilities

Elaine Bonner-Tompkins

Serving limited English proficient students, particularly those with or at-risk of developing disabilities, is an increasing challenge for state and local school systems. While the research is mixed as to whether LEP students are under- or over-

represented in special education, the number of language-minority students with or at-risk of developing disabilities will continue to rise.¹⁶ LEP students eligible for special education must have access to effective instructional supports that enable them to achieve at high levels of academic performance. This article describes effective practices in pre-referral, referral, disability assessment, and instruction that meet the needs of LEP students.

Pre-Referral, Referral and Assessment

School systems could mitigate issues of over- and under-classification if they adhered to a formal and comprehensive system of pre-referral, referral and assessment. Pre-referral is a screening and intervention process for identifying problems experienced by students in general education, identifying the source of the problems and taking steps to resolve such problems within general education classrooms. Pre-referral teams usually include an administrator, a general education teacher, a special educator and school support personnel. Among limited English proficient students, the pre-referral team should also include a bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor. In addition to reducing unnecessary referrals to special education, the pre-referral process can enable teachers to design and implement inclusive education strategies that address a continuum of learners in general education.

¹⁶ Artiles, A. Presentation at The Civil Rights Project Forum on Minority Over-Representation, Cambridge, MA. November 17, 2000. (www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/conferences/SpecEd/exsummary.html)

Referrals of students to special education should indicate that all other avenues have been explored and the general education program alone cannot meet the students' needs. Referrals may also indicate the presence of a disabling condition. Comprehensive assessments are required to determine the existence of such a disability and its specific nature. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) mandates that a comprehensive assessment include the results of tests in the child's native language and English for language-minority students (Sec. 614.3.A.ii). Moreover, IDEA prohibits the classification of children as disabled if the determining factor is a lack of instruction in reading or math or limited English proficiency (Sec. 614.5). To verify the appropriateness of a referral, assessments of disability must consider the appropriateness of the school's curriculum, the qualifications and experience of the teacher, and the appropriateness of instruction provided to the student. The referral and assessment process must also document a child's problems across settings, along with evidence that a child has experienced difficulties in both languages and that s/he has not made satisfactory progress despite having competent instruction.

The Assessment and Intervention Model for the Bilingual Exceptional Student (AIM for the BEST), mirrors several of the best practices described above. Critical features of this model include: adoption of effective instructional strategies for language-minority students by general education teachers; validation by teachers of difficulties experienced by students and attempts to resolve them within the general education classroom; requests for assistance from a school-based problem-solving team

if problems persist; initiation of special education referrals if strategies prove ineffective; incorporation of informal assessment procedures into the comprehensive individual assessment; and employment by special educators of effective instructional practices if an ELL has an identified disability.¹⁷ Evaluation results from AIM for the BEST indicate higher scores on English vocabulary and writing samples among language minority students, as well as reductions in referrals to special education.

Effective Instructional Approaches

Prior research studies have identified a number of strategies for delivering effective instruction to diverse learners at-risk of developing disabilities. They include: using visuals to reinforce concepts and vocabulary, utilizing cooperative learning and peer tutoring, using students' native language strategically when students are floundering, providing opportunities for students to practice speaking English in both formal and informal contexts throughout the day, and focusing on rich and evocative vocabulary words during lessons so students remain engaged and challenged.¹⁸ Specific strategies for promoting high achievement among ELLs include: high quality instruction in either bilingual education or ESL classes, special educators

¹⁷ Ortiz, A., & Wilkerson, C. Assessment and intervention model for the bilingual exceptional student (AIM for the BEST). *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 14, 35-42. 1991

¹⁸ Gersten, R. et. al "Effective Instruction for Learning Disabled or At-Risk English-Language Learners: An Integrative Synthesis of the Empirical and Professional Knowledge Bases, National Council on Learning Disabilities, Inc., 2001.

employing multiple methods of instruction, instruction that emphasizes interesting reading materials, and opportunities for students to express ideas in new language.¹⁹ Culturally responsive instructional approaches and materials can also enhance learning among diverse learners with disabilities. Elements of such include: instruction that uses student-experiences as tools for building knowledge, content rich curriculums, individualized instructional approaches, interactive teaching, and classroom materials and school environments that reflect students-diverse backgrounds.²⁰

The Optimal Learning Environment (OLE) curriculum features several effective practices for serving limited English proficient at-risk of developing learning disabilities. Initiated as a set of classroom activities to teach language arts to Spanish-speaking students in resource rooms, features of OLE include: student choice, student-centered instruction, balanced literacy approaches, active student participation, experiential learning, immersion in language and print, opportunities to apply learning, communities of learners and high expectations for all students. Currently, the California Department of Education uses the OLE model to provide staff development to migrant education staff. Migrant/OLE at California State University, Sacramento sponsors state-wide and regional three day reading academies for teaching personnel, migrant education coordinators, and parents to support achievement among

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Correa, V., et al., *Minority Issues, Improving the Implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Making Schools Work for All America's Children*, Supplement, National Council on Disabilities, April 26, 1996.

migrant education students in general and special education Migrant/OLE also sponsors follow-up collaborative meetings on school sites to support the change process, reflect on student work and connect professional readings to the practices of instructional staff. Evaluations of Migrant/OLE workshops and materials indicate that teachers from very different classrooms across the state implement research-based instructional strategies with English language learners.²¹

State and District Strategies To Support Effective Practice

State and district efforts to strengthen systems of pre-referral, referral, assessment and instruction should include a number of approaches: encouraging greater collaboration between general, bilingual and special education; instituting pre-referral strategies; providing training on the strengths and needs of diverse learners; developing a cadre of teachers with expertise in bilingual special education; encouraging greater parent and professional collaboration, particularly among communities of color; and developing monitoring systems to identify and investigate problems with over and under-identification. Additionally, states and districts should take greater steps to ensure that all students are included in state accountability systems. Large numbers of English Language Learners are not tested with statewide academic assessments. The scant data on ELLs suggests that those that are tested are often not provided with the appropriate

²¹ For more information on Migrant/OLE visit <http://www.educ.csus.edu/Projects/ole/english/default.html>

accommodations. Moreover, English Language Learners with disabilities are even less likely to be identified, assessed, or given appropriate accommodations for testing.²² As states and districts focus on strengthening their systems of identifying and serving ELLs with disabilities, they must also focus greater attention on including all students in the state's accountability and school improvement framework.

²² Thurlow, M. Presentation at The Civil Rights Project Forum on Minority Over-Representation, Cambridge, MA. November 17, 2000. (www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/conferences/SpecEd/exsummary.html)

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