

Task Force on Quality of Life in Austin for Hispanics: Education Summary of Literature on Hispanic Student Achievement Gap

When evaluating the K-12 educational experience, four measures highlight the achievement gap for Hispanic students:

- Standardized test scores
- Rates of students failing grade level
- Dropout, retention, and graduation rates
- Rates of students enrolling in and graduating from higher education

These gaps in the achievement of Hispanic students have been studied and discussed for some time, and dozens of models explaining them have been proposed. The following is a list of key issues affecting Hispanic student achievement identified in a review of the literature listed in the attached annotated bibliography:

- Segregation into high poverty, high minority schools
- Low levels of pre-school enrollment
- Family conditions
 - Poverty
 - Education of parents
 - Single-parent households
 - Immigrant
- Student behavior
 - Motivation and effort for learning
 - Youth culture and peer pressure
 - Alcohol and drug use
 - Crime
 - Gangs
 - Teen motherhood
- Disparate treatment of Hispanic students
 - Enrollment below grade level
 - Enrollment in advanced and college-preparatory classes
 - Disciplinary measures
 - Tracking
 - Expectations
 - Career and educational opportunities beyond school
- Teachers, curriculum, policies, and programs
 - Inequities in distribution of quality teachers within and between schools
 - Teacher training
 - Minority representation among teachers and staff
 - Classroom environment and learning strategies
 - Bilingualism – programs, teacher training, and student treatment
 - School reform and targeted programs
 - High-stakes testing and promotion, retention, and graduation policies
- Community involvement, capacity, and organization

Different researchers, programs, and strategies focus on one or more measures of achievement and issues that affect student outcomes. The following are an initial selection of priority issues and recommendations, strategies, programs, and policies to address them.

Teacher quality

- focus on research-supported indicators of teacher effectiveness in **hiring**
 - strong verbal and math skills
 - deep content knowledge (Haycock 1998)
- **recruitment and retention** to attract the best into teaching profession (Haycock 1998)
- collecting **data** to measure teacher effectiveness through student outcomes
- **professional development** in a targeted, collaborative, and evaluated atmosphere. (Closing the Achievement Gap 2004); ongoing, on site, and focused on the content that students should learn (Haycock 1998)
- Teacher training for multicultural and linguistic minority students (President's 1996)
- equitable **distribution** of quality teachers; address the following issues:
 - “Emergency hiring, assignment of teachers outside their fields of preparation, and high turnover in underfunded schools” (Darling-Hammond 1996)
 - where teachers come from and where they want to teach
 - interdistrict differences in salaries for beginning and midcareer teachers
 - the practice of concentrating beginning teachers in school buildings with concentrations of poor children
 - district policies – often gained through collective bargaining – that reward senior teachers with the ‘right’ to transfer to ‘easier’ schools
 - practices within schools where teachers fight over who teaches whom, resulting in the senior, better-educated teachers teaching the most-advanced children
 - the absence of clear incentives and prevalence of disincentives for teachers to work with poor and minority children (Haycock 1998)

Student treatment and performance

- mentorship, counseling, and student-centered institutional support (Gándara 1998)
- setting clear goals and establishing high expectations for student achievement (state tests, mastery of curriculum, and college preparation) (Open Doors 2001)
- increasing minority participation in challenging academic courses (Kober 2001)
- Target youth apprenticeship, mentoring, and career pathway opportunities for Hispanic students. (President's Advisory Commission 1996)
- providing extended learning and more intensive programs for students having difficulties (Kober 2001); non-stop learning – longer days, weeks, years ((Thernstrom 2003)
- Need to provide pre-school education for all Hispanic American children who qualify. (President's Advisory Commission 1996)

Educational support programs

- Focus on: program quality, academically demanding curriculum, professional development, family involvement, reduced student-to-teacher ratios, individualized supports, extended learning time, community involvement, long-term (multiple-year) supports for youth, and scholarships and/or financial support. (James 2001)
- Provide parents with access to and information on the public school system
- Have a significant Hispanic presence among the dedicated and professional staff, serving as mentors

- Provide opportunities for small-group work, self-directed learning, peer-group activities and leadership opportunities
- Offer comprehensive services to students and their families that assist in addressing the multiple needs and challenges
- Integrate Hispanic culture into services and programs in order to assist students navigating cultural differences between their home, community and school
- Have professional and capable leaders who develop strong networks with the community
- Provide bilingual services and information to students and their families
- Have staff who know their program goals and take steps to measure progress, confront obstacles, and implement policies to achieve these goals. (Brown 2004)
- methodologically sound program evaluations that provide disaggregated data in order to adequately measure program effects on minority academic achievement. (James 2001)

School reform

“Many administrators continue to assume that changes in the organizational structure of schools – block scheduling, advisories, Small Learning Communities – will result in changes in the classroom. Research on school reform has shown that such change rarely occurs (Fullan & Miles, 1992), and that lasting improvements in teaching and learning can only come from a strategy focused on improving instruction (Elmore, 1996).” (Noguera 2004)

Recommended strategies from the literature include:

- Creating a positive school culture; instill the desire, discipline, and dedication to succeed (Noguera 2004; Thernstrom 2003)
- Develop high academic and behavioral standards and expectations for all students (Noguera 2004; Thernstrom 2003; Opening Doors 2001; DoD Model 2003)
- provide on-site, year-round professional development designed around teachers’ needs (Noguera 2004)
- require a high level of parent involvement. (Noguera 2004; DoD Model 2003)
- Take the time to make sure that teachers, parents, and students understood the purpose behind each reform strategy and have mechanisms in place to evaluate whether a reform is achieving its goal. (Noguera 2004)
- Shared responsibility and shared values—accountability, commitment, and discipline—across schools, their communities, families, and students (DoD Model 2003)
- Provide nonstop learning; from pre-school to summer school to after-school (Thernstrom 2003; DoD Model 2003)
- Using student performance data to guide instruction, focusing on instruction and individual learning, supporting teachers and enhancing collaboration, and fostering an environment of respect and affection for students (Opening Doors 2001)
- Empower and train teachers to match curricula to the unique needs of Hispanic students and make instruction interactive and student-centered (Reyes 1999; DoD Model 2003)
- Create shared common aspirations, goals, and visions of what should be expected of Hispanic students and their schools among adults and student peer groups (Reyes 1999)
- Assessment needs to be ongoing and advocacy-oriented (Reyes 1999)
- Teachers should work to empower students to become excited about and responsible for their own learning. (Reyes 1999; Llano Grande)
- Clear goals and accountability measures; use of data to drive decisions for management, policy, and practice (DoD Model 2003)