



Para nuestros niños

National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

La Comisión Nacional para la Educación de la Niñez Hispana

The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics July 2006 www.ecehispanic.org

Initial Task Force Recommendation: State governments should continue to expand the availability of high quality pre-K, including availability for Hispanics, with universal pre-K as a goal.

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Although Hispanics represent a large, rapidly growing share of the nation's young children, they are the least likely to be enrolled in a preschool program. The enrollment rate for Hispanics in preschool programs is about 32%, while the rates for non-Hispanic whites and African Americans are, respectively, 55% and 50%. This is particularly troubling given the potential cognitive and other school readiness benefits of preschool for Hispanic children.

A recent study found that gains in cognitive/knowledge scores in a state universal pre-k program were in fact *largest* for Hispanic children. Hispanic students had a 79% gain in test scores on letter recognition after participating in a state universal pre-k program compared to a 52% and 53% gain by white and African American students respectively. Similarly, but even more dramatic, Hispanics experienced a 54% gain in applied problems compared to 21% and 6% gain by African American and whites respectively. Hispanic students (and African American students) have much to gain from state funded pre-k programs.

However, as mentioned, Hispanic enrollment is remarkably low. This may be because pre-k programs are not part of the regular public school system in most areas and are predominantly private; the cost may prevent many Hispanic families from enrolling their children. Others believe that the relatively low enrollment rate of Hispanics in early childhood programs may be linked to a preference for providing child care directly at home by the mother or close relative, and reluctance to turn over the care of their child to a non-relative.

There are a number of family characteristics that uniquely contribute to low enrollment of Hispanic children in pre-k programs as well. In addition to the effects of maternal employment and household income, it has been found that children were less likely to enter a pre-k program when they were younger (age three, not four-five years), when a father or another adult resided in the household, when mother had a low educational attainment, and when children's books were less evident in the household. Hispanic families are particularly distinguished by these characteristics. It has been found, however, that the Hispanic pre-k enrollment gap persists even after controlling for the aforementioned factors, and hypothesized that cultural differences may account for further differences in enrollment rates.

Another factor that may be limiting the participation of Hispanic children in early childhood education programs is that many recent Hispanic immigrants have been settling in areas where there have historically been few Hispanics. For example, between 1990 and 2000, Hispanic population growth rates were 394% in North Carolina, 300% in Georgia; 211% in South

Carolina, and 208% in Alabama. Few states, including some of the high Hispanic-growth states in the South, currently provide preschool programs to more than 20 percent of the 4-year-olds in their populations. And, other providers of preschool may have enrollment capacity limits in many communities. Consequently, many parts of the South may not be equipped to provide newcomers with adequate child care and preschool services.

Although federal and state education spending has grown, government funding of early childhood programs remains generally low relative to demand. Insufficient funding translates into lack of access for many children, particularly Hispanic children, who are already underrepresented in preschool programs, including Head Start and state-preschool programs. Inadequate funding can also contribute to high teacher turnover and low teacher quality (i.e., educational attainment) in Pre-K programs. Considering that Hispanic children have the most to gain from quality preschool, and that there will be growth in the population for years to come, the Task Force urges state governments to substantially increase investments in pre-k.

Garcia, E., Jensen, B., Cuellar, D. (2006). *Early Academic Achievement of Hispanics in the United States: Implications for Teacher Preparation*. The New Educator, 2:123-147. (available at www.ecehispanic.org/work/TheNewEducator.pdf)

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