

# **EARLY ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION**

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## **Overview**

Hispanics account for over one-fifth of newborns in the United States, and Hispanic children, on average, achieve at much lower levels from kindergarten forward than the non-Hispanic white majority and Asian Americans. Thus one of the most important educational challenges for the U.S. is to increase markedly the percentage of Hispanic children who enter kindergarten “ready” for school. Given that the early childhood years provide possibly the best window for improving academic trajectories for Hispanic children, this paper describes what is currently known about and offers recommendations to expand and improve early childhood education for Hispanics.

## **Pre-Kindergarten Programs for Hispanic Children**

There is a growing body of evidence that high quality prekindergarten programs (those for 3- and 4-years-old) can have a positive impact on the school careers of many children, particularly those from low socio-economic families. There also are some promising approaches to nurturing the cognitive development of infants and toddlers from disadvantaged circumstances. In addition, some elementary school improvement strategies seem to be producing meaningful academic achievement benefits for low socio-economic and Hispanic students. As a result, there is reason to believe that the period from birth through age eight currently constitutes the best window of opportunity for making improvements in the educational trajectories of disadvantaged children, including Hispanics, in the United States. At the elementary school level, there is still much to be learned about what strategies, especially in the PK-3 period, may be most academically beneficial for Hispanic students. Furthermore, Hispanics have been less likely over the years to attend center-based prekindergarten than their African American and White peers.

## **Recommendations**

A number of critical items will need to be pursued in order to improve and sustain achievement of young Hispanic children in the U.S, such as:

- Much better information will be needed regarding who young Hispanics are and how they are doing developmentally and academically. If the quality of early education is to be improved for Hispanics, much better information will be needed regarding factors that influence the developmental and achievement patterns of the Hispanic population.
- Central to efforts to improve early education opportunities will be initiatives designed to expand understanding of the productivity of existing early childhood programs and strategies for Hispanic youth.
- Hispanic children continue to be underrepresented in pre-school programs and full-day kindergartens, therefore more information is needed on why this is the case and what might be done to increase participation.

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