



The Hispanic Student Experience in Connecticut's Schools Lauren Velazquez, M.P.P.

March 2009

Connecticut's Hispanic Students Have Been Left Behind

As the Hispanic population continues to grow in our schools and in our communities, the educational attainment and skill level of this population will have a greater and greater impact on the population at large. Analysis of educational data trends from Connecticut schools paints a distressing picture for the future of the state. Public schools are failing to educate and retain Hispanic students. Hispanic children in the state's public schools are more likely than their white (non-Hispanic) and black counterparts to score below proficient on standardized tests. They are more likely to be absent from school and are more likely to drop out of the school system altogether. Hispanic children are not reaping the benefits of public education to the same degree as their peers.

Hispanics Are the Largest Minority Group in Connecticut

Hispanics represent the largest minority group within the nation and the state of Connecticut. As of 2007, 11.5% of Connecticut residents were Hispanic.¹ More than 92,000 Hispanic students are currently enrolled in Connecticut public schools². Hispanic students represent more than 16% of the overall student population and are the largest represented minority group in Connecticut schools today.

Standardized Assessment

In the era of accountability-driven education systems, standardized test scores have become the main indicator of academic success. In Connecticut, all elementary school students take the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). This test assesses students' reading, writing, and math skills. Since 2006, Hispanic students, on average across grade levels, have consistently performed worse than any other group on the CMT in reading and writing.³ In math assessments, Hispanic students perform only slightly better than their black counterparts, who still lag significantly behind the state average. Unfortunately this trend continues in upper grades as well.

% 4th Graders Meeting CMT Goal	2006	2007	2008
Hispanic math	29.9%	34.2%	36.2%
Black math	27.2%	31.8%	33.2%
White math	70.0%	73.9%	74.7%
Hispanic reading	31.6%	31.6%	33.4%
Black reading	33.1%	33.2%	35.2%
White reading	73.6%	73.3%	74.0%
Hispanic writing	36.8%	37.3%	37.7%
Black writing	38.7%	38.5%	39.0%
White writing	72.0%	73.2%	73.3%

CT Voices analysis of CMT scores as reported by the Connecticut State Department of Education, www.ctreports.com

Hispanic students are also falling behind on national assessments. For the past decade, Hispanic students in the state have consistently scored lower in reading than any other group (with the exception of an aberrant peak in scores in 2003). This gap persists when students go on to high school; for the past five years, less than one third of all Hispanic students met goal levels on the state's CAPT test for high school students.⁴ For these high school

students, a gap between white and Hispanic students' scores persisted even when poverty was controlled for.⁵ If we view standardized tests as an indication of acquired knowledge, it is appallingly evident that the school system in Connecticut is failing to equip Hispanic students with basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Not only is there a gap between the scores of Hispanic and white students on Connecticut's standardized tests, there is also a gap in scores on the SAT. Since SAT scores are used as a factor in college admission, students with lagging scores will have a more difficult time being accepted into schools. The average SAT scores for the *bottom* quartile of admitted students in University of Connecticut were 560 for math and 530 for reading⁶. The scores for Hispanic students fall far below this mark. As of 2005, the average scores of Hispanics in Connecticut were 436 for math and 439 for reading⁷. Each of these scores is nearly 100 points below the average scores of white students⁸.

Participation in School

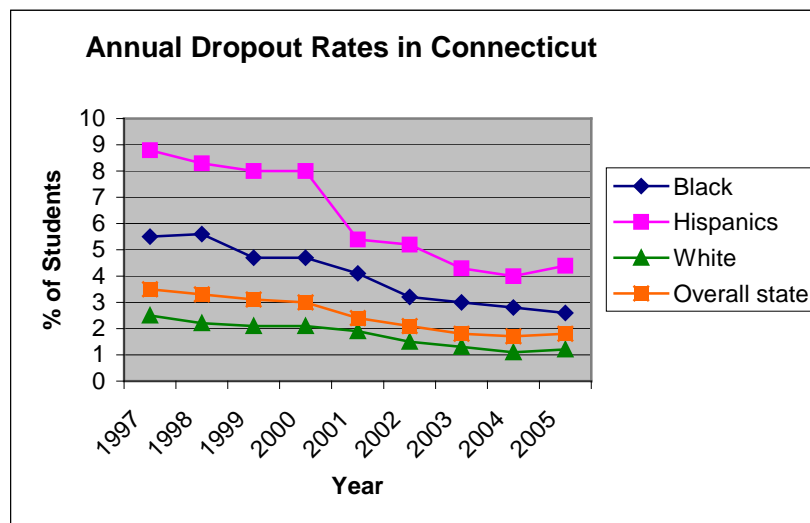
One axiom of school success is that students need to go to school to succeed. There are many reasons why a student may miss school. Whatever the reason, Hispanic students are absent from school at higher rates than their peers. As reported by the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance, Hispanics (regardless of poverty level) were *least* likely of any group to attend school on a daily basis.⁹ In 2006, Hispanics had an average daily attendance rate¹⁰ of 91.4%, while white students had an average daily attendance rate of 94.2%.

Preparation for College

While Hispanic students comprise a large share of the overall student population in the state, they make up a disproportionately small fraction of students who take advanced placement courses in preparation for college. For example, in 2005 alone, Hispanics represented more than 16% of the state's 12th grade students, but made up only 6% of students who were enrolled in at least one AP course.¹¹ Students who take advanced placement courses in high school are better prepared for college than their peers, as advanced placement courses expose students to the more rigorous academic environment that they will experience in college. Students who successfully complete advanced placement courses also can earn free college credit while in high school and reduce the overall financial burden of attending college by using AP credits towards a degree. The under-representation of Hispanic students in these courses means that they are less prepared than their peers for post-secondary schooling.

School Completion

While their dropout rate has fallen in the past decade,¹² Hispanic students, compared to all other racial/ethnic groups, are still the most likely to exit the school system before graduation. ***By 2005, Hispanic students were almost 4 times more likely to drop out of school than white students.***



CT Voices analysis of dropout data from the Connecticut State Department of Education, "Annual Dropout Rates by Ethnicity"
www.cde.ct.state.ct.us/public/cedar/cedar/dropout/index.htm

Schools are also failing to graduate Hispanics at the same rate as their white peers. Over the past decade, Hispanic students have consistently been underrepresented in graduation counts.¹³ While many of the students who fail to graduate have dropped out of high school, some students fail to graduate from high school because they instead enter an alternative certificate or adult education program and are not considered drop outs.¹⁴ Other students are not represented in graduation counts because they take more than four years to graduate but do not drop out.¹⁵ Regardless of the reason, data show that Hispanic students are not receiving 4-year high school diplomas at the same rate as their white (non-Hispanic) peers.

Those Hispanic students who do graduate from high school are still less likely than their white peers to attend college. Throughout this decade, only 37% of graduating Hispanics continued on to a two- or four-year college, compared to 64% of whites.¹⁶ And most of the Hispanic students who went to college attended a two-year college, thus putting themselves at a disadvantage to their white peers, who were more likely to complete four-year degrees.

Hispanics in the Labor Force

The more educated an individual, the more competitive he or she is in the labor market. Analysis of current labor market trends illustrate that Hispanics earn less than their white counterparts, and are twice as likely to be unemployed than their white peers in Connecticut.¹⁷ In 2007, 4% of the white population in Connecticut was unemployed, while 8% of the Hispanic population was unemployed. In 2007, the median household income for white families in Connecticut was \$65,967.¹⁸ That same year, Hispanic families on average only earned an estimated \$41,948.¹⁹ Education, which has been strongly correlated with labor market success and higher earnings, holds enormous potential to boost the labor market strength of the Hispanic population. Unfortunately, Hispanic students are behind their peers in school and are in danger of continuing the trends already seen in the adult Hispanic population in the labor market.

Conclusion

At every point throughout the K-12 system, Hispanic students are being left behind. Hispanic students are more often struggling with standardized tests, not attending school, dropping out, or not going on to college. It is apparent that Connecticut's educational system is not meeting the needs of this population. As a result, inequitable outcomes for Hispanic students in our schools continue unchanged.

¹ U.S. Census ACS 2007 survey http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTable?_bm=y&-context=dt&-ds_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_&-CONTEXT=dt&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B01003&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B02001&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B03001&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B03002&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B05001&-mt_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G2000_B01002I&-tree_id=307&-redoLog=false&-geo_id=04000US09&-search_results=01000US&-format=&-lang=en

² Enrollment data from SDE. Data can be accessed at <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/edfacts/enrollment/public.htm>

³ CMT data from SDE Assessment Center.

⁴ Raw CAP data from CSDE assessment reports "emetric;" can be found at <http://CAPT2.captreports.com> (2001-2006) and <http://solutions1.emetric.net/captpublic/CAPTCode/Report.aspx> (2007-2008)

⁵ To hold poverty constant, scores were removed for all students below the federal poverty level as indicated by participation in the free and reduced lunch program.

⁶ As reported by an overview of UConn found at http://colleges.collegetoolkit.com/colleges/admissions/university_of_connecticut/129020.aspx

⁷ Averages calculated by CT Voices using district SAT mean scores between 2000-2005 found at <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/DER/datacentral/MultipleSearch.asp>

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Connecticut Consortium on student attendance report "Student Attendance Data: Key Findings, August 2008" p 15. Document can be accessed at <http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2974&q=383624#AttendanceData>

¹⁰ Average daily attendance is calculated by dividing days present by the days enrolled.

¹¹ Analysis by CT Voices of enrollment and SDE data collected from <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/assessment/national/ap.htm> (AP) <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/edfacts/enrollment/index.htm> (12th grade enrollment)

