

# ED316616 1989-00-00 Hispanic Education in America: Separate and Unequal. ERIC/CUE Digest No. 59.

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## Hispanic Education in America: Separate and Unequal. ERIC/CUE Digest No. 59.

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School desegregation efforts in the United States have traditionally been aimed at providing black students with equal access to quality education. Although the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in the Keyes case clearly stated that Hispanic students also have

a right to desegregation remedies, few attempts to integrate Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students have been made. In fact, while the level of black student integration has remained relatively stable since the late 1960s, Hispanic students are more segregated today than they were 20 years ago.

Meanwhile, gaps in educational attainment and earnings between Hispanics and non-Hispanics continue to widen, offering strong evidence that segregated schools are not preparing the rapidly growing Hispanic student population to succeed in a predominantly non-Hispanic society.

## GROWTH OF THE HISPANIC POPULATION

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the nation's Hispanic population has grown almost five times faster than non-Hispanic populations in the last ten years. Should the current demographic trends continue, Hispanics will become the nation's largest minority group by 2020.

This growth has particular consequences for the nation's public schools. In 1968, there were about two million Hispanic school-age children in this country; by 1986, that number more than doubled to 4,064,000 (Orfield, 1988). While Hispanic students made up 4.6 percent of the school-age population in 1968, by 1988 they comprised 10.5 percent of that population (National Council of La Raza, 1989).

In addition, the U.S. Hispanic population is highly concentrated in certain regions and major cities. Three-fifths of Hispanic students attend school in either Texas or California (Orfield, 1988). Still, many large urban areas outside the Southwest--New York, Chicago, and Miami, for example--also have very large, concentrated Hispanic populations. With 87 percent of Hispanics living in metropolitan areas, they are the nation's most metropolitan population (National Council of La Raza, 1985).

## INCREASING SEGREGATION

Orfield's demographic studies of school enrollments (1989) demonstrate that Hispanic students have become steadily more isolated in virtually all parts of the country since 1968, the first year in which separate data on Hispanic enrollments were collected. For instance, 54.8 percent of Hispanic students attended predominantly non-white schools in 1968, and 18 years later, 71.5 percent of Hispanic students were in such schools. This mirrors the rise in the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in "intensely segregated" schools--more than 90 percent minority enrollment--from 23.1 percent in 1968 to 32.2 percent in 1986.

In fact, while the average black student is still more likely to be in a segregated school than the average Hispanic student, this trend has been reversing at an accelerated rate since 1980 (Orfield, 1989).

A recent study looking at school enrollments in the Houston Metropolitan area (Ponicki,

1989) shows a steady increase in the segregation of Hispanic students within the Houston Independent School District since 1968, when the percentage of white students in the class of the average Hispanic student was 38 percent. By 1986, that percentage was only 14 percent. Ponicki also found Hispanic students enrolled in suburban schools were much less segregated.

Orfield's data show that in spite of the differences in education levels, income, and political power of students from different Hispanic backgrounds--Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Latin American--all Hispanic Americans face increasing levels of school segregation in all parts of the country (Orfield, 1989).

Orfield (1989) attributes this growth in Hispanic segregation not only to rising Hispanic enrollments, but also to the disproportionate concentration of Hispanic students in urban school districts with large minority enrollments and a lack of any significant initiatives for desegregation.

Part of the explanation for the increase in segregation lies within the Hispanic community itself. Castellanos (1980) suggests that, because racism has not been institutionalized in Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Cuba, many Spanish-speaking immigrants to the U.S. do not see the issue of desegregation as a priority. They don't mind that their children go to school only with other Latinos, and they are more comfortable dealing with schools in which the majority of the parents and students share their common culture, language, and values. Further, they may fear of loss of power--political and economic--as a result of a diffusion of the Hispanic community.

The main reason why Hispanic parents and leaders have not pushed as hard for integration as have black leaders is that many believe Hispanic students are better served in a predominantly Hispanic schools where extensive bilingual educational services are more likely to be offered.

According to Fernandez and Guskin (1981), while blacks and Hispanics publicly espouse similar goals in terms of equal educational opportunities, the means by which the two groups promote these goals often appear to be in conflict. Desegregation for blacks and bilingual education for Hispanics have emerged as the respective symbols by which these two communities judge improvement of their educational condition. For the most part, Hispanic participation in desegregation cases has been limited to attempts to protect the integrity of existing bilingual programs; ensuring the successful integration of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students has not been a concern (Fernandez & Guskin, 1981).

## THE NEED FOR DESEGREGATION

Such concerns on the part of Hispanic leaders are not adequate explanations for a lack of action in the area of Hispanic school desegregation for two reasons. First, the

Supreme Court stated in the *Keyes* decision that Hispanic students are entitled to both a desegregated education experience and bilingual education programs. Second, the data on the Hispanic educational attainment demonstrate that segregated schools are not providing Hispanic students with an equal opportunity for success.

**Rights of Hispanic Students.** Historically, the segregation of Hispanic students was not as pronounced as it was for black students, although both Texas and California did, at one time, maintain separate schools for Mexican-Americans. Not until 1970, 16 years after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision declared racially segregated schools unconstitutional, did a Texas district court judge rule in *Cisneros vs. Corpus Christi* that Mexican-Americans should be treated as an identifiable minority group, and that the combination of two minority groups apart from white students did not achieve desegregation.

The 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Keyes v. Denver School District* addressed the language needs of desegregated Hispanic students. The Court stated that a meaningful desegregation plan must not only physically integrate Hispanic students, but must also help them proficient in English. In other words, bilingual education can be derived as a component of a desegregation remedy, but it cannot be the remedy for a segregated school system (Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, 1981).

**Educational Outcomes.** Even in schools with predominantly Hispanic student populations many students are not receiving the bilingual education that they are entitled to under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

According to a report by the Network of Regional Desegregation Assistance Centers (1989), many state education agencies' bilingual education departments do not closely monitor school districts for compliance with the Title VI requirements. Consequently, many bilingual students in this country--about 84 percent of whom are Hispanic--do not receive the services they need in order to succeed academically.

A study by the Children's English and Service Society found that only 36 percent of children identified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) had been assessed by their schools as such, and that two-thirds of those identified LEP students between the ages of five and 14 received no special language services (National Council of La Raza, 1985).

In addition, the evidence exists that the isolation and segregation has had several detrimental effects. First, Hispanics have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group in this country. One-half of all Mexican-American and Puerto Rican students do not graduate from high schools (National Council of La Raza, 1989). In 1986, when Hispanics represented almost 10 percent of the nation's students, they were only 5 percent of all college students. Although the total number of Hispanic students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has risen slowly in the last decade, because of the enormous rise in the total number of college-age Hispanic students, there has been an

actual decline in the percentage going on to higher education--from 35.8 percent of all Hispanic 18-to-24 year olds in 1976 to 29.4 percent in 1986 (Orfield, 1988).

Hispanic students' isolation from the educational mainstream in high school causes few Hispanic students to be prepared for college in the way that many white and Asian students are. Their curriculum, and teacher expectations for them, are often of a considerably lower level (Orfield, 1988). According to the National Council of La Raza (1989), 38 percent of Hispanic high school seniors are enrolled in remedial mathematics classes, and 75 percent have been placed in low-level curricular programs that make college education improbable.

Meanwhile, the income gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic families continues to increase, with more than one-fourth of Hispanic children living in poverty. Orfield (1988) notes that children living in neighborhoods with large concentrations of low-income children are likely to attend schools with lower levels of competition, more distractions, and less qualified and less experienced teachers. Many Hispanic students attend school districts with low per-pupil expenditures, high pupil-teacher ratios and limited resources. If current practices continue, Hispanics are not only destined to become the nation's largest minority group, but also the most disadvantaged.

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