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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes issues and perspectives that form the basis of current educational debate. The paper contends that early in the 21st century, Hispanics and other minorities will constitute the majority of the work force in major markets across the nation. The lack of preparedness of over half the potential pool of minority workers will have a profound negative impact on the U.S. economy. The paper sketches and notes the disadvantages of three potential strategies: (1) expensive retraining of workers; (2) reformulation of jobs so that they require low skill attainment and pay sub-living wages; and (3) automation or the seeking of skilled workers from abroad. The paper summarizes major themes of the education reform movement and presents the following broad policy recommendations: (1) business leaders must play a more powerful role in the national education debate; (2) strong parent involvement in school-based activities and in supporting education at home must be vigorously promoted; (3) accountability and national standards must be set and upheld; (4) the dependency of the U.S. retirement system on the contributions of minority workers must be publicized; and (5) a balance must be struck between reforms that require increased revenues and those that require behavioral and organizational change. Two appendixes are included. (AF)

The Challenge Of Education

No Time To Waste
No Room For Failure

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Cuban American National Council, Inc.
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The academic achievement of U.S. students—rich and poor alike—is falling behind that of other western countries. The nation's competitive position depends on the preparedness of its leaders, managers, and workers. The complex challenge of improving our education systems, therefore, must become a national priority. **There is no time to waste and no room for failure.**

This paper represents a summary of the issues and perspectives that form the basis of the current educational debate.

By and large, the contents in this publication were derived from oral presentations made at the Cuban American National Council Fifth National Conference in January 1990. Most of the sources cited within were speakers and participants of four consecutive workshops, two luncheons, and a banquet. Supporting information from other sources is also included.

CNC is grateful to all the conference speakers who left us with a wealth of information and ideas, and a deeper understanding of the educational crisis we face as a nation. They are an impressive mix of School Board members, District administrators, principals and teachers, union leaders, community and business leaders, government officials, and social scientists from various ethnic groups. All conference speakers are listed at the end of this publication.

Additional recognition is due to the following individuals, organizations, and publications for their excellent source materials: Anna M. Sioles, Arnhilda Badia, *The Wall Street Journal*, ERIC's *Digest 1989* series,

Newsweek, *The New York Times*, The Heritage Foundation issue briefs, and various policy analyses conducted by the National Council of La Raza, and the Hispanic Policy Development Project. Many of the above were also invaluable as sounding boards for the interpretation of data, and for their ideas about current research issues on education reform. Statements not attributed to a source are the sole responsibility of CNC, as are the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

We hope this issue paper will leave our readers with a greater sense of urgency about the need for education reform, the need to define some common guiding principles in this area, and the need to enlist the support of the American public at large in the enormous effort that change entails. We must lead with answers before the problems inherent in low educational achievement drain our resources and devastate entire generations of our youth.

Summary of Issues and Education Themes; Policy Recommendations

Early in the 21st century, Hispanics and other minorities will account for the majority of the workforce in major markets across the nation. Because the pool of experienced mainstream workers is rapidly aging, the lack of preparedness of over half the potential pool of minority workers will have a profound negative impact on the U.S. economy. If this dire situation continues to be neglected, private industry will be forced to take some or all of the following undesirable steps:

- spend millions of dollars in the basic retraining of workers;
- reformulate jobs so that they require only low skill attainment--and pay sub-living wages;
- automate or seek skilled workers from abroad.

The first solution, expensive retraining, does not bolster the U.S. competitive position. The second, dropping skill and salary levels, dangerously increases the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots", and the third, automation or immigration, increases the price of doing business while swelling the ranks of the unemployed.

To a large extent, the strategies listed above create more problems than they solve. An educated citizenry is the solution of choice and there is consensus among

America's leaders, both from the public and private sectors, that our education system needs major structural change.[1] There is recognition that Hispanics and other minorities constitute a growing majority at the nation's largest school systems. There is growing understanding of the effectiveness of multicultural and multilingual initiatives that respond to students and their families, and there is increasing support for multicultural and multilingual literacy to help the United States perform better in highly internationalized markets.

As a consequence, initial steps have been taken across the country and plans are under consideration to make our education systems responsive to the needs of students and the needs of the nation. Although proposed changes in education cross customary ideological and partisan lines, lively and sometimes heated debate continues around specific programs and policies and around implementation. One issue of major concern is how the nation can pay for reform strategies in times when new revenues are not likely to materialize.

The following list contains the major themes—some of which overlap—that run through the education reform movement: Increasing Standards; Effective Schools; Students At-Risk of Dropping Out; Schools in the Context of the Community and the Economy; Improving Teaching Standards and the Teachers' Environment; Pre-School; Middle-School; Parent Involvement; Culture and Values; Choice; Equity; Vocational Education and the Transition from School to Work.

It is clear that there is no single solution that will magically reform education. School systems, communities, and student bodies differ and so, therefore, do the strategies that respond to their needs. But there is grow-

[1]Alicia Coro, Director/School of Improvement Program, U.S. Department of Education.

ing consensus that, in the words of Leticia Quesada, Member, L.A. Unified School District, "our public school system is fundamentally archaic; it serves our majority students inadequately and, all too often, it is hostile and damaging to minority students." Moving from that premise—supported by statistical evidence of student achievement— some broad policy recommendations can be drawn.

- Business leaders, who have a large stake in improving education, must play a more powerful role in the national education debate.
- Strong parental involvement in school based activities and in supporting education at home must be vigorously promoted.
- Accountability and national standards must be set and upheld.
- The dependency of the U.S. retirement system on the contributions of minority workers must be publicized to broaden public support for education reform.
- A balance must be struck between the reforms that require increased revenues—such as teachers' salaries and building repair—and those that require behavioral and organizational change—like parent involvement and school-based management.

America will not remain a first class nation if it continues to neglect its children. We must accept the challenge to change and we must find the courage to act boldly.

The Faces of the Challenge

A web of connected factors influence how well schools work. The education problem and the education solution exhibit more than one face.

Education reform is not tomorrow's issue. Improvements are needed today, desperately. Indeed, in the words of New York City schools Chancellor Joe Fernandez, "some of us are still trying to get into the 20th century."

Current dropout and poverty statistics show that our schools and our children are in deep trouble. The dropout rate among students of Hispanic origin hovers around 40 percent. The same proportion of Hispanic children in the United States are poor.[2] A recent concept paper released by the group Hispanics in Philanthropy estimates that nearly one in every five Latino births in 1986 were to teenagers 18 years or younger. Half of these babies were born to unmarried mothers.

An equally alarming statistic is that 25 percent of the Hispanic students who do graduate from high school lack basic skills to succeed in the workplace. Other indicators point to the underachievement of Hispanic students as a whole. The undereducation of Hispanics begins very early and is compounded by language. By the third grade, Hispanic children fluent in English are below grade level academically.[3] And in California, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were found to be far more at risk of leaving school than fluent English proficient students.

[2]Rosa Castro Feinberg, Dade County School Board member.
[3]Nelson Perez, Administrator, Dade County Public Schools.

In 1989 the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) served 249,000 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.[4] Even using the lowest estimate of 1.7 million LEP students in the United States, it is clear that the vast majority of LEP students are not being served by programs funded through OBEMLA, but depend instead on similar programs financed by state and local funds, when such programs are available.

In addition to high dropout rates, academic underachievement, and inadequate work skills, our educational problems include insufficient representation of Hispanics and other minorities in policy making and administrative bodies, inadequate teacher salaries, and unacceptable levels of drugs and violence in public schools. In fact, in the nation's largest school systems rates of drug- and violence-related incidents have reached record levels. In 1989 there were 100 gang-related incidents per day in the city of Los Angeles. And in New York, thousands of serious incidents in the public schools are reported yearly.

Hispanics, though severely impacted, are not the only victims of America's educational crisis. In 1988, 700,000 of the nation's 3.8 million students 18 years of age dropped out of high school, and an equal number could not read their high school diplomas. In New York City, half the public school system's students read below grade level.

[4]Carmen Simich-Dudgen, Research Director/OBEMLA.

Minorites — The New School Majority

The America of the 1990s and beyond bears a new face, reflecting a dramatic shift in this country's demographics in recent years. The future of this new America is being shaped by many factors, including the enfranchisment of Blacks and other minorities, and a dramatic shift in migration patterns from European to Asian and Latin American immigrants. This demographic shift has had a profound effect on the ethnic and cultural make up of our schools:

- So-called minorities now make up the majority of school aged children in cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami.
- Hispanic school age children numbered four million in 1989, or 10 percent of all those in the country.[5]
- In New York, 80 percent of the school population is Hispanic and African-American.
- In California, 51 percent of all students are ethnic minorities.
- In Dade County, 44 percent of the student population is Hispanic and 33 percent Black.
- In Chicago, Blacks andHispanics make up nearly 80 percent of the public school population.

[5]ERIC 1989 *Digest*.

During the 1990s the large number of ethnics in public education will make their success an all-American concern. Education in the 21st century cannot afford the massive failure of students. The present and future impact of ethnic minorities on the economic system as a whole is profound and must be addressed.

Parental Involvement

American leaders, almost unanimously, are beginning to favor increased parental involvement in educational [illegible]es through greater participation in school-based activities.

There is no simple answer to promoting greater parental involvement. Barriers to parental involvement come from both the schools and the parents. In many cases, schools don't understand Hispanic parents and vice-versa. Misunderstanding breeds alienation, discomfort, and distance between the two. Many schools tend to have unworkable parent programs that demand that parents conform to what the school had "always been doing," and to what is convenient for the teachers and the school personnel. On the other hand many Hispanic parents come from cultures where school teachers were accorded the respect due priests, lawyers, and doctors, and parents are not expected to participate in school-based activities or question teachers. They were highly respected people: you didn't question them.[6]

In many families, too, parental involvement in school activities is affected by the high incidence of single parent families or cases where both parents work.

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[6]Siobhan Nicolau, President, Hispanic Policy Development Project.

Overall, Latins tend to associate along kinship and friendship lines, rather than through larger, more complex and impersonal institutions.[7]

A direct, personal approach to parental outreach is found to be the most successful method to integrate home and school. "We need people to go out to the homes to talk to parents, to work with parents," says Nelson Perez of the Dade County School System. "A number of kids come from families where the home situation is part of what is creating their problems."

Progress is slow, but gains in the involvement of parents have been reported in many areas, including some of the largest and most troubled districts in the country.[8] In Chicago parents showed massive involvement when their participation in the educational restructuring process was made possible.

Values, Culture and Expectations

Values

The question of teaching values in school is very complex since religious and cultural values vary widely between different groups. Furthermore, school teachers and administrators do not reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. Teachers and administrators are, for the most part, middle and upper-middle class Anglos whose values and models of behavior may be foreign to the Hispanic student. Not only is there a need for greater representation of Hispanics among educators, but classroom teachers and administrators must also be trained to recognize and respond to the cultural diversity in schools.

[7]Lisandro Perez, Chair, Sociology/Anthropology Dept., Florida International University.
[8]Yvonne Chan, Principal, Sylmar Elementary School.

The subject of values in school must be directly addressed. According to Antonio Jorge, Professor of Political Economy, "all knowledge is value laden. There is no such thing as abstract disembodied knowledge." It is clear that in the absence of a clear set of values and expectations, however, children develop their own systems and codes of behavior. There is growing concensus among experts that teaching basic functional values, such as respect for authority, honesty, kindness to others, etc., should be included in the national educational debate.

The way in which values are expressed in school affects students' motivation and their expectations for themselves and their educators. The teaching of values is often a balancing act in which educators work to impart and reinforce basic human ethics and citizenship while trving to lessen the impact of certain pervasive messages of popular culture which tie self-esteem to material possessions.[9] In all cases, schools must be culturally sensitive, recognizing the customs and values learned at home, church, and on the street.[10] Heriberto Dixon, of the New School of Social Research, believes that "children have a culture, children have values....the role of the school is to add on to those values, not to serve as a great steamroller and flatten those children."

In addition to giving children models for behavior, cultural, religious, and ethical values provide a context for historical and current events, for example, the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and Black churches.[11]

[9]Roberto Calderin, Executive Director, SOMOS UNO Foundation.
[10]Marilyn Braveman, Director of Education, American Jewish Committee.
[11]T. Willard Fair, President, Urban League of Greater Miami.

Culture

Cultural sensitivity cannot be stressed enough. Differing cultural norms at home and school can make life difficult for teachers and bewildering for students. What is seen as a "behavior problem" in the classroom, such as refusing to speak up in class, may be the expression of a valued characteristic at home—good children are quiet children.

Unfortunately, cultural sensitivity toward Hispanics has been largely absent in U.S. public education. Hispanic contributions have been neglected, omitted, and distorted in U.S. history textbooks.[12] This exclusion injures the self-concept and the self-esteem of Hispanic children throughout our nation.

The teaching of values in a culturally sensitive manner is in no way an easy or simple task. "An Ethics Primer for Children," by Anna M. Sioles, is an excellent example of the potential that exists in this area of education.

Expectations

There is a close relationship between student success and expectations. Rosario Anaya, a San Francisco School Board member, says: "Why Hispanics have limited success? The crux of the problem can be summarized in one word, expectations. Research shows that Hispanic kids who understand English are more likely to dropout because they are hearing and feeling in English that they are not worth anything." Her point is underscored by Alejandro Portes, a professor at John Hopkins Univer-

[12]Frank de Varona, Assistant Superintendent, Dade County Public Schools.

sity, who queries, "What can a student learn from a teacher that expects him or her to end up in prison...?"

In a compelling tale of rising above negative expectations, Lourdes Monteagudo, Chicago's Deputy Mayor for Education, shares her own childhood story: "When I was twelve, I was limited English proficient. I was given one of those first tests that somehow brand you for the rest of your life when I had just been in the (public) school for two and a half weeks. I was put in a sixth grade classroom and was told that if I behaved, I didn't have to do any work. By the end of my sixth grade, my parents were told I was retarded. By the time I was in eighth, I had become a miracle child. From being retarded I was gifted. Except that my record still showed I was retarded. I was given a temporary reprieve from my retardation, and allowed to be in an honors program on probation. Four years later, I graduated Valedictorian of my class; on probation because no one ever takes anything out of your record..."

Choice

Choice is one of the most complex, albeit disarming, themes in education reform. In its simplest terms, Choice allows parents to select the school they wish their child to attend, using vouchers for private schools or creating "magnet" schools that have a particular focus such as arts or accounting. The concept has gained momentum among liberals and conservatives alike.

Both President Bush and U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos support the furthering of parental involvement, and the promotion of choice in education. But in spite of a raised national consciousness about these two issues, there may be serious differences re-

garding how to proceed.

In coming years the debate around school choice may be not so much the concept but rather the methods of implementing changes, such as tuition tax credits, vouchers, broader geographic and functional tax bases, salary incentives, targeted federal assistance, shared decision making, and school-based management.

These and other alternatives will require innovative types of personal and institutional relations, different uses of tax resources, community education, reallocation of federal funds, new financial and managerial formulas and control systems, and more flexible arrangements concerning the use of public funds by private institutions.

Beyond the risks and controversy involved, our ability to achieve some of these changes will show our readiness as a nation to empower teachers, parents, and principals to lead our students into the future.[13]

Employment Impact

Improving educational attainment is perhaps the most critical factor in enhancing U.S. economic competitiveness in the future.[14] In addition to the immediate and unacceptable human cost of school failure by Hispanics and other minorities, poorly educated workers will have a negative impact on private industry operations.

A shockingly high proportion of people entering the workplace lack the basic skills business requires. For example, in 1988, 84 percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for an entry level job at the New York

[13]ModestoMaidique, President, Florida International University.
[14]Tony Villamil, Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Telephone Company failed. The functionally illiterate account for 30 percent of America's unskilled labor, 29 percent of our semi-skilled labor, and 11 percent of our managerial, professional, and technical employees.

By the year 2010, 85 percent of new jobs will be filled by minorities, recent immigrants, and women—the very groups who are most severely affected by the educational deficiencies cited above. The gap between the education level of the U.S. workforce and the educational requirements of jobs in our fastest growing sectors is wide and growing. This alarming trend must be reversed. An increase—not a decrease—in worker's productivity will be necessary if the United States is to compete in the growing and highly sophisticated global markets.

The shrinking labor pool has stripped corporations of their ability to choose workers.[15] The education of all of America's workers in the 21st century is critical.

Business, government, and community agency representatives express shared concerns regarding the impact of undereducation in the workplace and the need to tackle this issue comprehensively.[16] Corporate America is showing unprecedented concern over the need to develop a skilled workforce, and currently spends $300 million a year on training employees in basic skills.

M. Anthony Burns, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Ryder System, a six-billion dollar corporation, sums up the reasons to provide all people with an adequate education: "The companies and institutions that are a good place for all people, that are

[15]Nancy Dreicer, AT&T executive from Jacksonville, Florida.

[16]Harriet Spivack, Private Industry Council.

comfortable with change, and comfortable with diversity, will be the real winners of the 1990s...Countries have become more competitive by being more productive and more efficient through a better educated workforce. A better trained workforce and a workforce that addresses human needs for those that maybe aren't quite as lucky, maybe those that aren't quite as fortunate as many of us, is the key to real success."

THE SCOPE OF CHANGE

While there are many areas of consensus, educational reform will not occur without some disagreement and discussion. Areas that require further research include the following:

- **Setting goals:** There is a need to establish timetables, cost projections, and goals for education. The business community must join educators in this task.[17]
- **Curriculum:** Many feel there are serious deficiencies in text books regarding sensitive issues such as sex, cultural values, and religion. There is already much public debate on curriculum and teaching methods. The debate must include views from outside the traditional educational circles.[18]
- **Funding:** There must be greater coordination of resources and integration of funding and programs at all levels in government, the private sector, and education communities.[19]
- **Bilingual education:** It is ironic that recommendations from economists and business leaders for greater cultural and language literacy in America coincide with a period of "English Only" anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. Changes in educational policy toward greater multicultural consciousness will face serious challenges unless our national debate enjoys the active and enthusiastic support of our business community.

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[17]David Reddick, Sun Bank Executive and Representative of Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.
[18]Charlotte Greenberg, Dade County P.T.A.
[19]Hector Velazquez, President, National Puerto Rican Forum.

- **National standards in education:** Controversy over this issue continues with some espousing the need to set national standards for academic performance and to hold students, teachers, and principals accountable to meet them, while others recommend proceeding cautiously with the idea of national standards.

- **Accountability:** Accountability refers to educational outcomes and performance standards as well as to the types of authority and responsibility held by decision makers. While many agree on accountablity as a tenet of educational reform, debate continues around specific operational models.

Conclusion

Education remains at the top of America's national agenda. In just five years, education has become a leading issue for business leaders, appointed and elected officials, and the public.

At present, the debate seems to focus more on effecting structural changes than in seeking new major outlays of money or significant changes in educational financing mechanisms. Financial restrictions such as mandated budget deficit reduction guidelines, competing social problems such as AIDS and drugs, the Saving & Loans crisis, and momentous international developments, suggest that a major shift in attention and resources toward a sustained effort on behalf of education reform will not occur in the immediate future.

A growing number of educators and parents alike, business leaders, and public officials of various persuasions seem to agree that educational improvements will depend on our ability to innovate and change existing institutional arrangements.

We are presented with a unique opportunity to make significant improvements in our troubled education systems. We must show our ability to compromise on resource utilization issues and our willingness to be flexible to try new alternatives—or to return to the basics—as the case may be.

In any event, major participants in the debate agree on one thing: we cannot wait for more resources; we must act now and we cannot afford to fail.

APPENDIX 1

SPEAKERS AT CNC NATIONAL CONFERENCE
Miami, Florida
January 24-26, 1990

Workshop I
"Education Goals and Expectations for the 21st Century"

Chair: Antonio Jorge, Professor of Political Economy
Florida International University
Senior Research Scholar, University of Miami

Panelists: Rosario Anaya, Commissioner
San Francisco Board of Education

Alicia Coro, Director/School of Improvement Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Lourdes Monteagudo, Deputy Mayor
Chicago Department of Education

Rosa Castro Feinberg. Member
Dade County School Board

Paul Cejas, President
Golden Glades Regional Medical Center

Murray Sisselman, President
United Teachers of Dade

Corporate Luncheon

Keynote Speaker: Jose Antonio Villamil, Chief Economist
U.S. Department of Commerce

Workshop II
"Hispanics, Minorities and Immigrants in Public Schools"

Chair: Javier Bray, Coordinator/Education Programs
Cuban American National Council

Panelists: Alejandro Portes, Professor
John Hopkins University

Leticia Quezada, Manager/Public Relations
Carnation
Member, L.A. Unified School District

Siobhan Oppenheimer Nicolau, President
Hispanic Policy Development Project

Heriberto Dixon, Associate Professor
New School for Social Research

Jay E. Laroche, Chief, Immigration & Refuge Affairs
U.S. Department of Justice/CRS

Carmen Simich-Dudgeon, Director
Division for Research & Evaluation
Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages
(OBEMLA)

Workshop III
"Schools and the W~~kplace: Public/Private Partnerships"

Chair: Anne Betancourt, Member
CNC Board of Directors

Special Presentation: Sarabeth Rodriguez
National Services Specialist
U.S. Bureau of the Census

Panelists: Lisandro Perez, Chair
Sociology/Anthropology Department
Florida International University

Harriett Spivack, Assistant to the Director
Private Industry Council

Nancy Dreicer, Vice President
Financial Services
AT & T

Nelson Perez, Director
Department of Career Education
Dade County Public Schools

David Reddick, Assistant Vice President/Manager, Public Relations
Sun Bank, N.A.

Hector Velazquez, President
National Puerto Rican Forum

Corporate Luncheon

Keynote Speaker: M. Anthony Burns,
Chairman, President and CEO
Ryder System, Inc.

Workshop IV
"Values and Curricula in the Classroom"

Chair: Celia Suarez, Associate Dean
Miami-Dade Community College

Panelists: Charlotte Greenberg, President
Dade County Council, PTA, PTSA

Yvonne Chan, Principal
Sylmar Elementary School

Marilyn Braveman, Director of Education
American Jewish Committee

Frank de Varona, Associate Superintendent
Dade County Public Schools

T. Willard Fair, President & CEO
Urban League of Greater Miami

Roberto Calderin, Executive Director
SOMOS UNO Foundation

Antonio Jorge, Professor of Political Economy
Florida International University
Senior Research Scholar, University of Miami

Closing Banquet

Keynote Speaker: Modesto Maidique, President
Florida International University

APPENDIX 2

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