

## LATINO TEENS STAYING IN HIGH SCHOOL: A CHALLENGE FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Although the percentage of youth who have not finished high school and are not enrolled in school, known as the “status” dropout rate, has declined for all youth (including Hispanic youth) since the 1970s, many Latino youngsters continue to drop out of high school. At 21 percent, the national Latino high school dropout rate is more than twice the national average at 10 percent. The Latino dropout rate conceals substantial diversity among Latino youth in their success in entering and remaining in U.S. secondary schools. Notably, youth’s best chance at completing high school, on average, is staying in school until graduation. The odds of finishing by passing a General Educational Development (GED) test, or some other high school equivalency exam, are at best fifty-fifty for all high school dropouts, and appear to be even lower for young Hispanic dropouts.

2000 High School Dropout Rates (in %)	
All 16 to 19 year-olds	10
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	21
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	7
Black or African American alone	12
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	16
Asian alone	4
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	11
Hispanic origin	
Mexican	25
Puerto Rican	17
Cuban	9
Dominican	12
Costa Rican	10
Guatemalan	35
Honduran	33
Nicaraguan	13
Panamanian	4
Salvadoran	28
other Central American	17
Argentinean	7
Chilean	6
Colombian	7
Ecuadorian	17
Peruvian	6
Venezuelan	5
other South American	8
All other Hispanic or Latino	15

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

### Differences among National Origin Groups

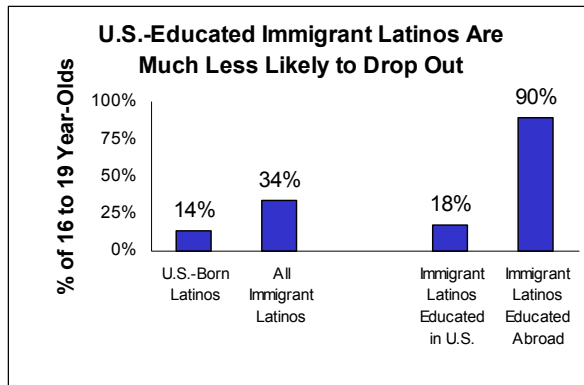
The bulk of Hispanic youth is of Mexican origin. About 25 percent of Mexican-origin 16 to 19 year-olds have not finished high school and are not enrolled in school. Some of the populations from Central America have higher dropout rates. Nicaraguan-origin youth have lower dropout rates, and many of the populations originating from South America have dropout rates similar to white youth.

### U.S.-Educated Children Are More Likely to Be in School

A significant proportion of teen Hispanic school dropouts are recently arrived immigrants who have never enrolled in school in the U.S. Estimates suggest that

around one third of teen Hispanic school dropouts have never enrolled in U.S. schools. The dropout rate of Hispanic youth who have been enrolled in U.S. schools is estimated at 15 percent—substantially below the 21 percent rate of all Hispanic teens.

**Immigrant Children in U.S. Schools Are Not More Likely to Drop Out** A considerable body of research, including a U.S. Department of Education survey that tracked a large



sample of students for six years from eighth grade on, comes to a single conclusion. Among Latino youth who are educated in U.S. schools, there is no statistically significant difference in the dropout rates for immigrants and the native born. Estimates based on Census Bureau data for 2000 show that the dropout rate for native-born Hispanic teenagers is 14 percent. Among immigrant Latinos who arrived in the United States young enough to do most of their schooling here, the estimated dropout rate is 18 percent.

**Males Are More Likely to Drop Out Than Females** Male Hispanic youth are more likely not to be enrolled in school than their female counterparts. For example, among native-born Latino 16 to 19 year-olds, 15 percent of males have not completed high school and are not enrolled, as compared to 12 percent of females.

**Student Attrition and Impoverished Families and Communities** A significant portion of the higher dropout propensity of Latino youth can be attributed to their less favorable family circumstances and the communities in which they reside. Almost 10 percent of Latino teens are not living with a parent, more than twice the rate for white teens. Parents can often be an important source of motivation and information that promotes high school completion. Only 51 percent of Hispanic children have mothers who themselves have finished high school, in comparison to 93 percent of white children. Hispanics are twice as likely as whites to reside in the central cities of metropolitan areas. Some central cities include inner city areas with poor educational climates that undermine educational attainment. Finally, among Latino teens with similar family resources and educational histories, teens with immigrant parents are less likely to drop out of high school. The reasons for this favorable “second-generation effect” are not agreed upon.

**Completing via GED** Hispanic students who do not graduate from high school are somewhat less likely than comparable whites to pass a GED test. By the time they are 26 years old, 43 percent of Hispanic dropouts have passed the GED, compared to 50 percent of white dropouts.

**Resources** U.S. Census Bureau. *School Enrollment: 2000*, C2KBR-26, Washington, D.C., August 2003.  
 Hirschman, Charles. “The Educational Enrollment of Immigrant Youth: A Test of the Segmented-Assimilation Hypothesis,” *Demography*, August 2001.  
 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Generational Status and Educational Outcomes Among Asian and Hispanic 1988 Eighth Graders*, NCES 1999-020, Washington, D.C., December 1998.

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