

# A Matter of Trust

Ten Key Insights from Recent Public Opinion Research on  
Attitudes About Education Among Hispanic Parents, Students and Young Adults



A Public Agenda Report Prepared for

**America's Competitiveness:  
Hispanic Participation in Technology Careers Summit**

**May 5–6, 2008**

**IBM Executive Conference Center, Palisades, NY**



# A Matter of Trust

## Ten Key Insights from Recent Public Opinion Research on Attitudes About Education Among Hispanic Parents, Students and Young Adults

---

Public Agenda Analysis by Paul Gasbarra and Jean Johnson

### Introduction

Hispanic students make up one-fifth (20.5 percent)<sup>1</sup> of the United States' public school population, and in large urban areas such as Los Angeles or Miami, they constitute an even larger share of the student body.<sup>2</sup> There are a number of positive signs about how these students are faring in our public education system. For instance, more Hispanic young adults are making their way into college. At the same time, the percentage of young adults who have dropped out of high school remains disturbingly high.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, a lower percentage of Hispanic students were enrolled in colleges and universities than black and white students, a historical trend.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past several years, Public Agenda, a nonpartisan research group that focuses on education issues, has been able to look closely at the views of Hispanic parents, students and young adults in a number of in-depth opinion surveys. We have explored how Hispanic parents rate their local schools, what problems they identify, what kinds of goals they have for the education of their children and what challenges they see ahead. We have surveyed Hispanic and Latino students in public middle schools and high schools nationwide. We have also talked to young Hispanics aged 18 through 25 as they experience their initial years in college and/or the workforce.

### Concerns Most American Families Share

In many respects, Hispanic families share the aspirations and anxieties of many other families nationwide: They are keenly focused on the role completing high school and going to college will play in their children's future. Students and young adults see success in school and college as key to interesting work and a prosperous future, and most are optimistic about their prospects.

Yet Hispanic parents, students and young adults also describe concerns, ideas, approaches and relationships with the public school system in ways that are sometimes distinctive. This brief, graphical summary, based on Public Agenda surveys taken over the last few years, lays out the chief differences and similarities. For those working to improve the overall educational opportunities available to Hispanic families, the findings here provide a report card on how well public education and higher education now serve the needs of this growing segment of the population. For those with a special commitment to ensuring that Hispanic students receive the preparation and support they need to pursue high-level careers in math, science and technology, this summary offers a clear identification of the starting point. In most cases, the findings speak for themselves. Even so, a few points warrant emphasis.

---

<sup>1</sup> "School Demographics: What Is the Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Our Schools?" The Center for Public Education 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Fry, Richard. "The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of U.S. Public Schools," Pew Hispanic Center, August 2007. (Available for download at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/79.pdf>.)

<sup>3</sup> Among Hispanic young adults age 16 to 24 years old, 22.4 percent are high school dropouts. See "The Condition of Education 2007" (NCES 2007-064) Table 23-1, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>4</sup> "Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities," National Center for Education Statistics, September 2007. (Available for download at [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/figures/figure\\_23\\_3.asp?referrer=report](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/figures/figure_23_3.asp?referrer=report).)

### **Placing a High Value on Going to College.**

Education and higher education in particular are even more highly prized and respected among Hispanic parents than among parents in general, despite some erroneous conventional wisdom to the contrary. Hispanic parents overwhelmingly agree that virtually all students are better off going to college than taking a job right after high school. Nearly 9 in 10 Hispanic young adults plan on teaching their own children that college is a requirement.

### **Trust in Educators.**

Most parents, from all walks of life, voice a high regard for educators, but Hispanic parents admire and express confidence in teachers, principals and superintendents to an even greater degree than other parents. For those hoping to spur parent activism to improve schools in Hispanic communities, this data may conjure up a picture of a school system that is garnering more trust than it deserves. On the other hand, the findings also demonstrate the credibility and influence educators have with Hispanic families. Used well, this sense of trust and respect could be put to good use.

### **Too Few Resources, Too Many Dropouts.**

Despite their overall esteem for educators, solid majorities of Hispanic parents are focused on two urgent issues—their belief that local schools get too few resources and their concern over an alarmingly high dropout rate. But there are other points of unease as well. Some of these can be linked to ethnicity and immigration trends, such as a heightened sense that schools are slow to teach foreign-born students English and are not doing as much as they could to “teach kids to get along with people from different cultures and backgrounds.” Others, such as fears about violence, weapons and drugs in local schools, mirror the apprehensions voiced by other low-income parents, especially African-Americans. Overall, it is hard to look at these numbers without concluding that far too many Hispanic families are underserved by public education—and to a significantly greater degree than the general population.

### **Students Who Could Do More.**

Like other American teens, Hispanic middle and high school students have many positive things to say about their teachers and their schools. Most are optimistic about their future and confident that they will do well. Yet their praise comes with a sense that teachers could push them a

little harder and that basics could be emphasized more. Among the most disheartening of the findings is the judgment by many Hispanic young adults—now looking back on their high school years—that schools and teachers could have done more to prepare them for the “real world.”

### **Doubts and Compromises on Higher Education.**

Like their parents, Hispanic students and young adults recognize the importance of continuing their education beyond high school, and most aspire to that goal. But Hispanic young adults are less likely than others to believe that adequate financial help is available for those who need it. Among those who do go on to college, young Hispanics are more likely than other college students to say that they would have gone to a different school if money had not been an issue.

### **The Full Reports.**

The findings summarized here come from three different Public Agenda reports. Data concerning young adults aged 18 to 25 comes from the 2005 report “**Life After High School: Young People Talk About Their Hopes and Prospects,**” available here: [http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research\\_reports\\_details.cfm?list=31](http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=31). Original funding for this study was provided by the College Board, GE Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation and KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

We also report on parent and student data from our report “**Reality Check 2006,**” available here: [http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research\\_reports\\_details.cfm?list=98](http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=98). This research was funded by GE Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Wallace Foundation.

Finally, we use data concerning the general population culled from our 2007 report “**Squeeze Play: How the Public and Parents—White, African-American and Hispanic—View Higher Education,**” available here: [http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research\\_reports\\_details.cfm?list=108](http://www.publicagenda.com/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=108). Conducted jointly by Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, this research was underwritten by the Lumina Foundation. Unless otherwise indicated, our analysis compares results from Hispanic respondents with those from all other populations combined. All reports are available online at [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).



# Study Findings

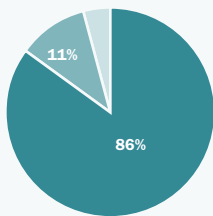


**Finding One:** Hispanic parents place a very high value on college, and they are more likely than other parents to believe that a college degree is necessary for a decent job and middle-class life.

**Eighty-six percent of Hispanic parents agree that virtually all students are better off going to college.**

In general, do you think that virtually all students are better off going to college after they finish high school, or do you think that many students could be better off doing something else?

Hispanic Parents

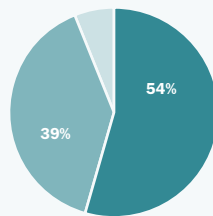


**86%** Better off going to college after high school

**11%** Better off doing something else

**4%** Don't know

All Other Parents



**54%** Better off going to college after high school

**39%** Better off doing something else

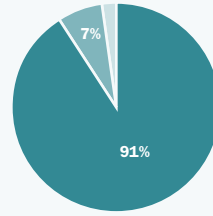
**5%** Don't know

Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**More than 9 in 10 Hispanic parents agree that the way to a good job and a comfortable lifestyle is through a college degree.**

Which comes closer to your view, there are many ways to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle without getting a college degree, or the best way to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle is to get a college degree?

Hispanic Parents

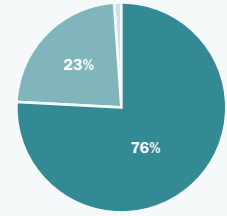


**91%** Best way to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle is to go to college

**7%** There are many ways to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle

**02%** Don't know

All Other Parents



**76%** Best way to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle is to go to college

**23%** There are many ways to get a good job and a comfortable lifestyle

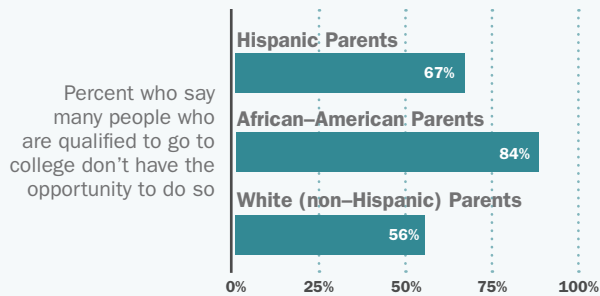
**1%** Don't know

Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

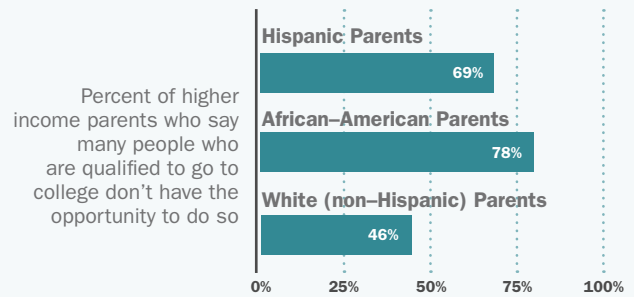
**Hispanic and African-American parents are substantially more likely to believe that many qualified and motivated students do NOT have the opportunity to go to college.**

Do you think that currently, the vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?



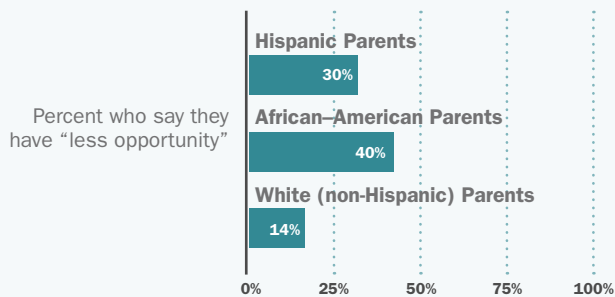
**Even higher-income\* Hispanic parents say that most qualified young people do not have the opportunity to attend college.**

Do you think that currently, the vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?



\* Parents making above \$50,000 per year.  
Source: "Squeeze Play," Public Agenda 2007.

Do you think that qualified students who are racial and ethnic minorities such as African-Americans and Latinos have more, less, or about the same opportunities as others to get a college education?

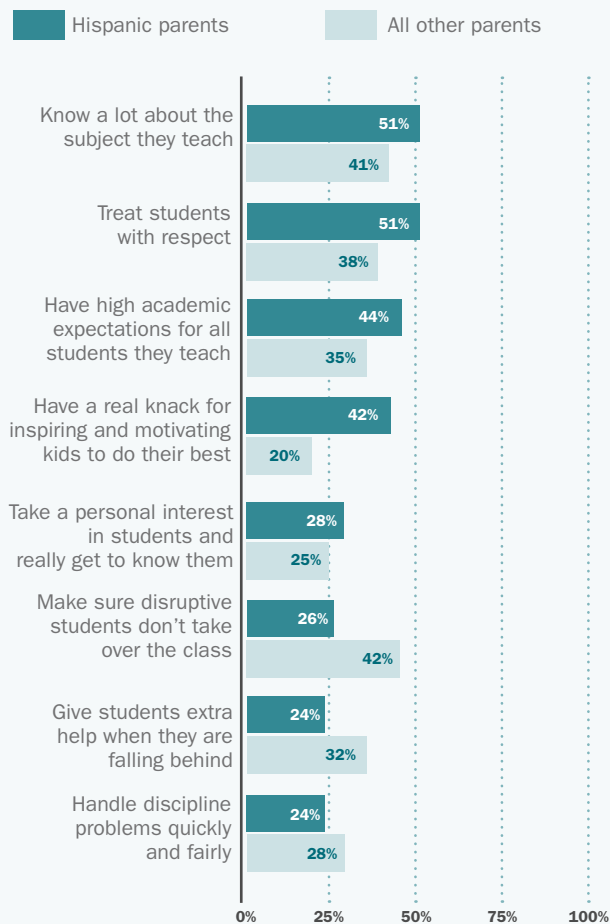


Source: "Squeeze Play," Public Agenda 2007.

**Finding Two:** Most Hispanic parents trust and respect educators. They are more likely than other parents to believe that teachers and school officials are doing a good job in many key areas.

**Hispanic parents are more confident than other parents that their children’s teachers are knowledgeable and have high standards for all students.**

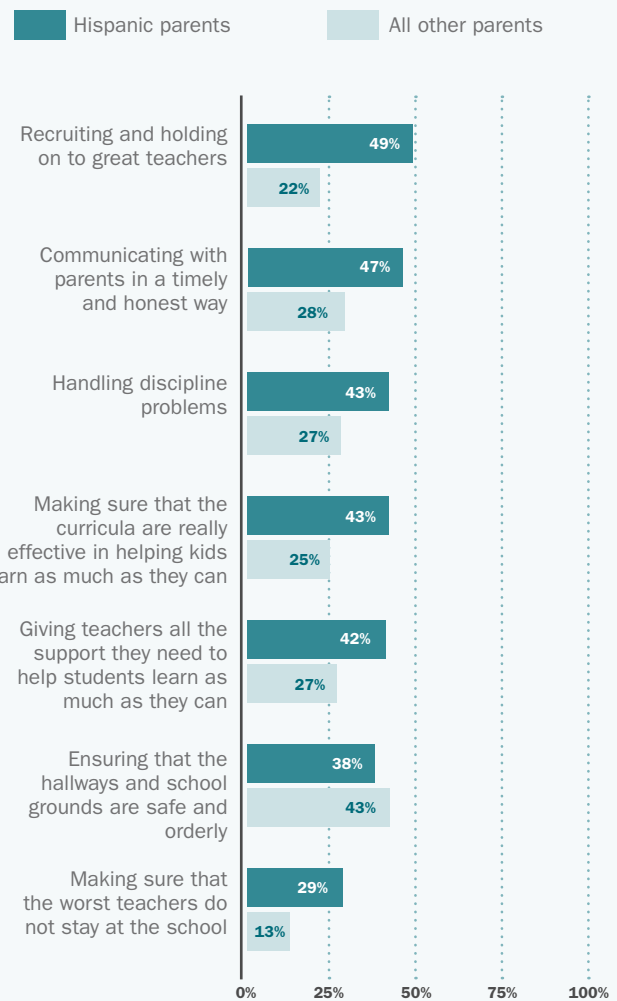
Percent of parents who say “all” of their child’s teachers:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Hispanic parents are more likely than other parents to give excellent ratings to principals in most key areas.**

Percent of parents who give “excellent” ratings to principals for:

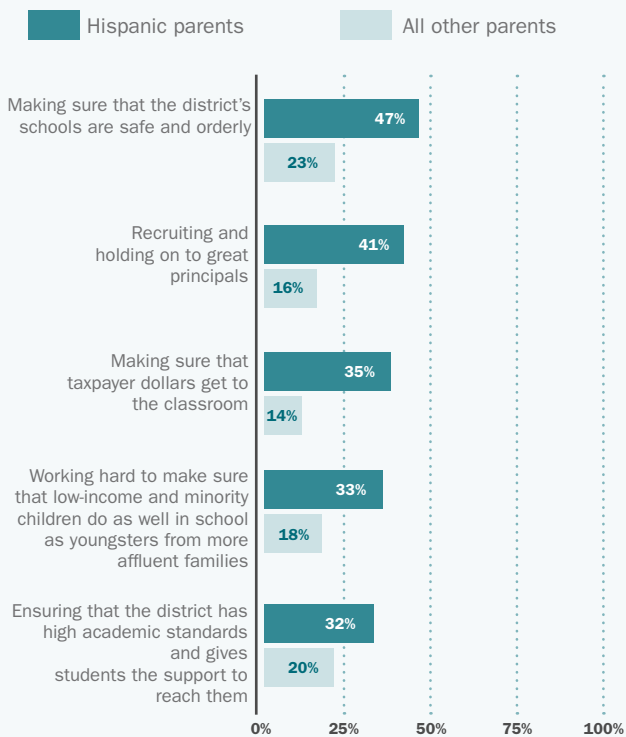


Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.



## Hispanic parents are also more likely to rate their local school superintendents highly.

Percent of parents who give “excellent” ratings to their school’s superintendents for:

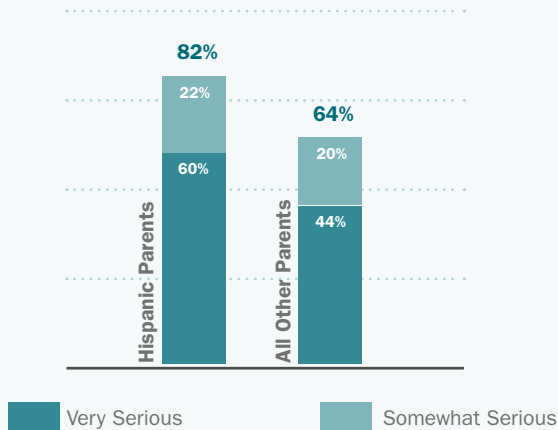


Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**Finding Three:** Despite their respect for educators, Hispanic parents are substantially more likely to say that a lack of resources and dropout rates are “very serious” problems at local schools.

**Most Hispanic parents say it is a serious problem that local schools are not getting enough money to do a good job.**

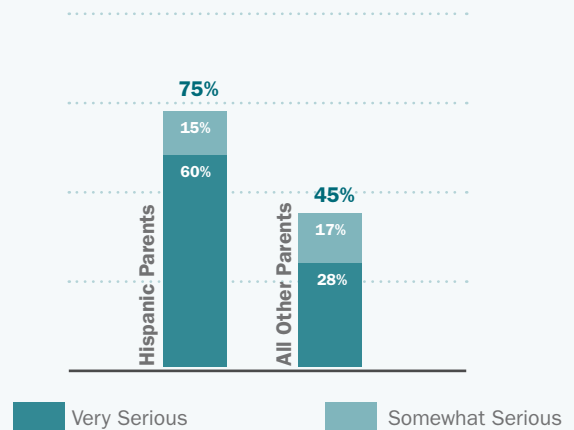
Percent of parents who say that it is a “very serious” to “somewhat serious” problem that schools are not getting enough money to do a good job:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Hispanic parents are much more likely than other parents to say that dropping out is a serious problem in local schools.**

Percent of parents who say that it is a “very serious” to “somewhat serious” problem that too many students drop out:



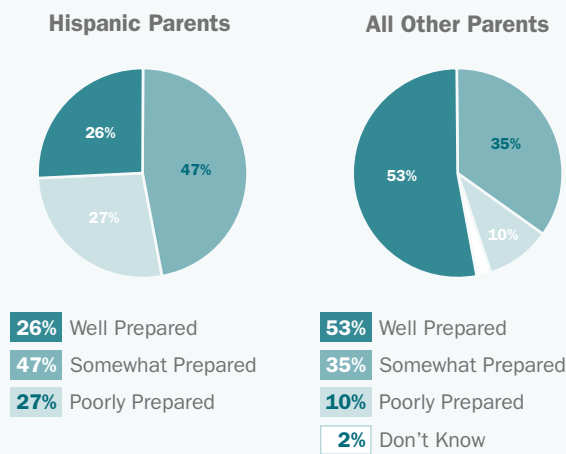
Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.



**Finding Four:** Hispanic parents are also more likely to question whether local schools are preparing their children for high school, teaching English quickly and effectively and offering strong math and science education.

**Hispanic parents are about half as likely as other parents to say their child was “well prepared” for high school after completing middle school.**

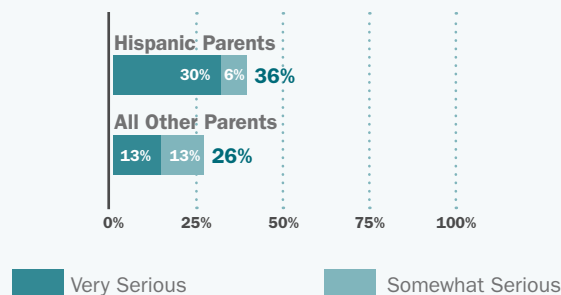
Thinking back to when your child entered high school from middle school, how prepared do you think he or she was, in terms of having the knowledge and skills necessary?



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Hispanic parents are also more likely to say that failing to teach kids from different cultures to get along is a serious problem in local schools.**

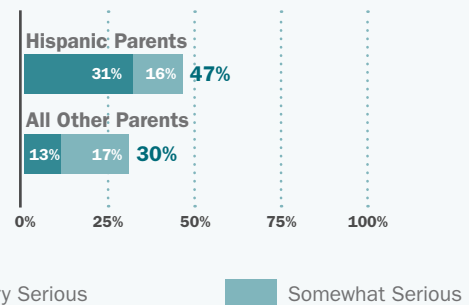
Percent of parents who say that schools failing to teach kids to get along with people from different cultures is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem in their child’s school:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Nearly half of Hispanic parents say it is a serious problem that schools are too slow to teach foreign-born students English.**

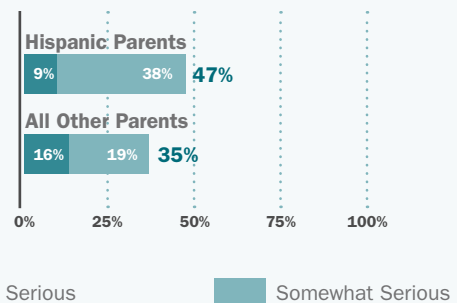
Percent of parents who say it is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem that their schools are slow to teach foreign-born students English:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Nearly half of Hispanic parents say it is a serious problem that students are not taught enough math and science.**

Percent of parents saying it is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem that kids are not taught enough math and science:

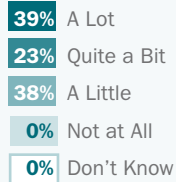
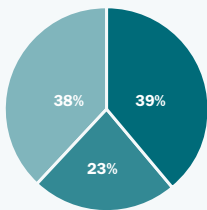


Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

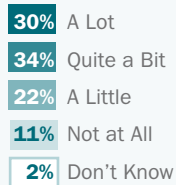
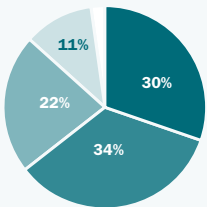
## About 4 in 10 Hispanic parents say increasing the number of math and science courses would improve high schools “a lot.”

How much do you think greatly increasing the number and quality of math and science courses students take in high school would improve high school education in the United States?

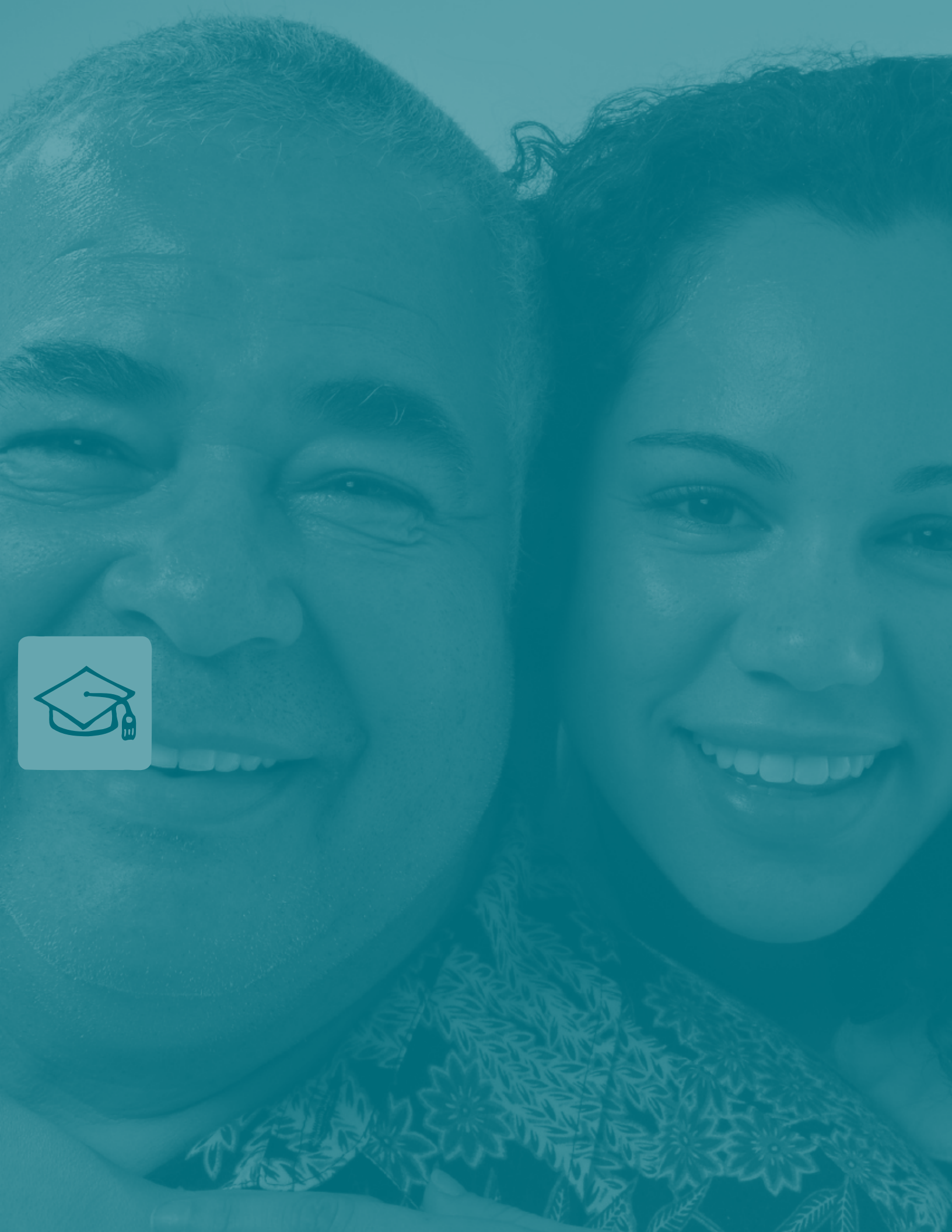
### Hispanic Parents



### All Other Parents



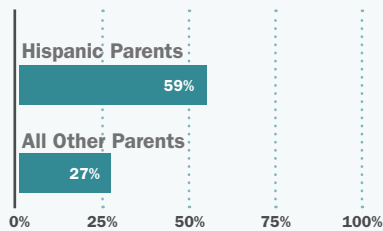
Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.



**Finding Five:** Hispanic parents are considerably more likely than parents in general to voice concerns about safety and discipline in local schools.

**Well over half of Hispanic parents say there is too much drug and alcohol abuse in local schools.**

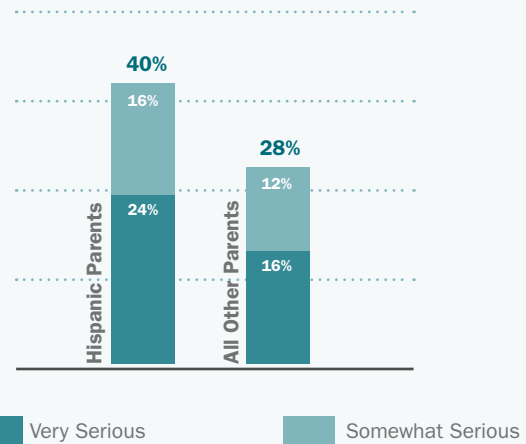
Percent of parents who say too much drug and alcohol abuse is a “very serious” problem in their school:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Nearly a quarter of Hispanic parents say fighting and weapons are a “very serious” problem in local schools.**

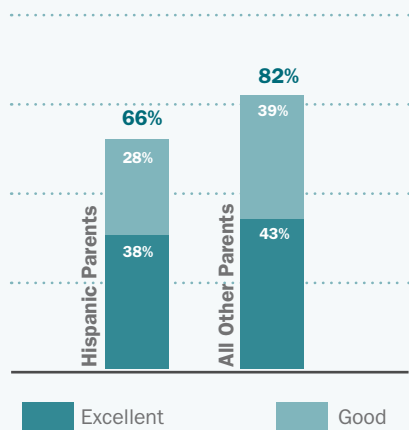
Percent of parents who say that too much fighting and weapons are a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem in their school:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Despite their generally positive views of school leaders, Hispanic parents are less likely than other parents to give local principals “excellent” or “good” ratings on safety and order.**

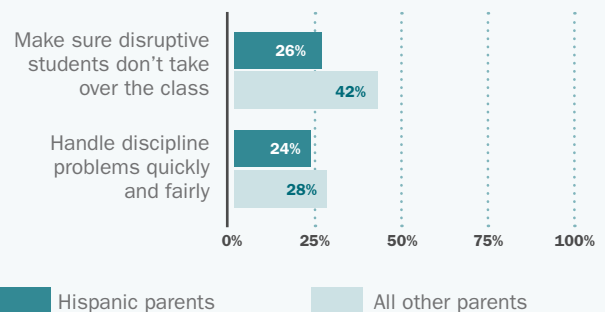
Percent of parents rating their principals as “excellent” or “good” when it comes to ensuring that hallways and school grounds are safe and orderly:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Hispanic parents are also less confident that teachers are handling discipline issues well.**

Percent who say that “all” of their child’s teachers:

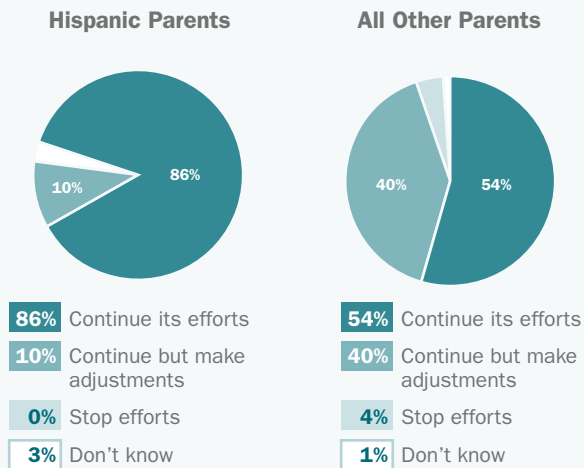


Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Finding Six:** Hispanic parents voice strong support for continuing to raise standards and other measures to improve high schools, but they are somewhat more concerned than other parents about toughening requirements for a high school diploma.

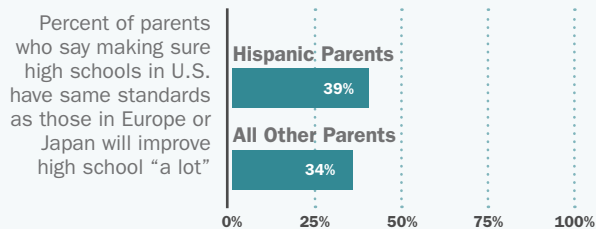
**Hispanic parents are much more likely than other parents to want local schools to continue their efforts to raise academic standards.**

When it comes to the effort toward higher academic standards, do you think your school district should:



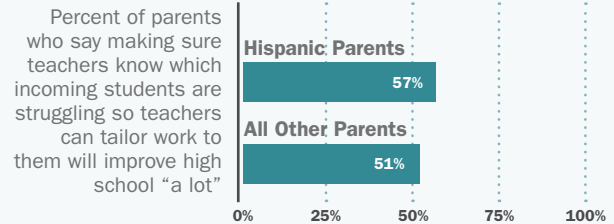
Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**Hispanic parents are more likely to support making sure U.S. standards match those in Europe and Japan.**



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

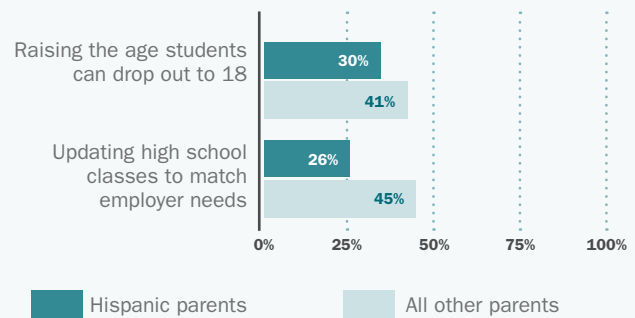
**Hispanic parents are more likely to support making sure teachers help struggling students.**



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**But Hispanic parents are less likely to support raising the age at which students can drop out and matching high school classes to employer needs.**

Percent of parents who say the following measures would improve high schools "a lot":

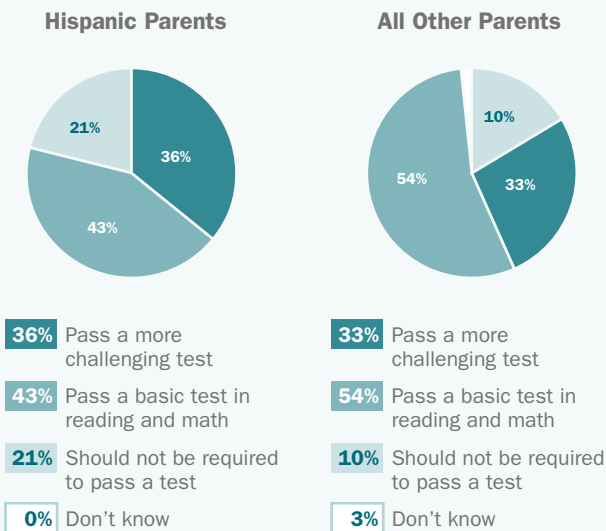


Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.



## Relatively few parents, Hispanic or non-Hispanic, would support toughening requirements for a high school diploma.

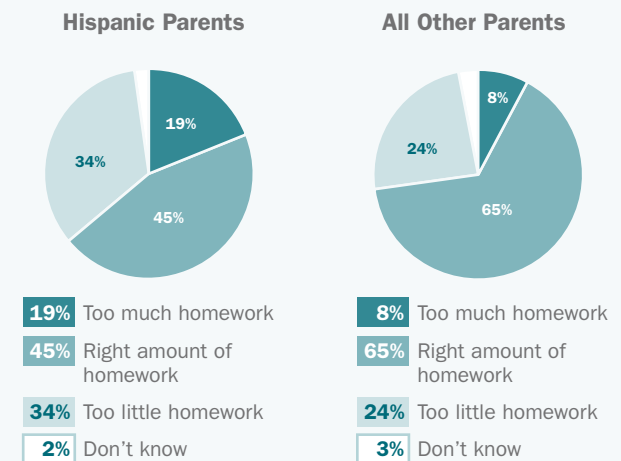
Before students are awarded a high school diploma, would you want your school district to require students to:



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

## Nearly 1 in 5 Hispanic parents say their child has too much homework.

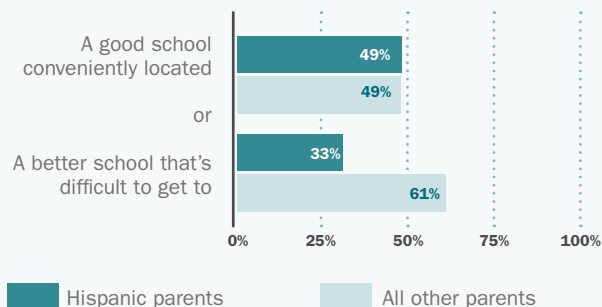
Overall, do you feel that your child is getting too much homework, too little or about the right amount?



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

## Hispanic parents are more likely than other parents to prefer to send their children to a good neighborhood school.

If you had to choose, would you send your child to:

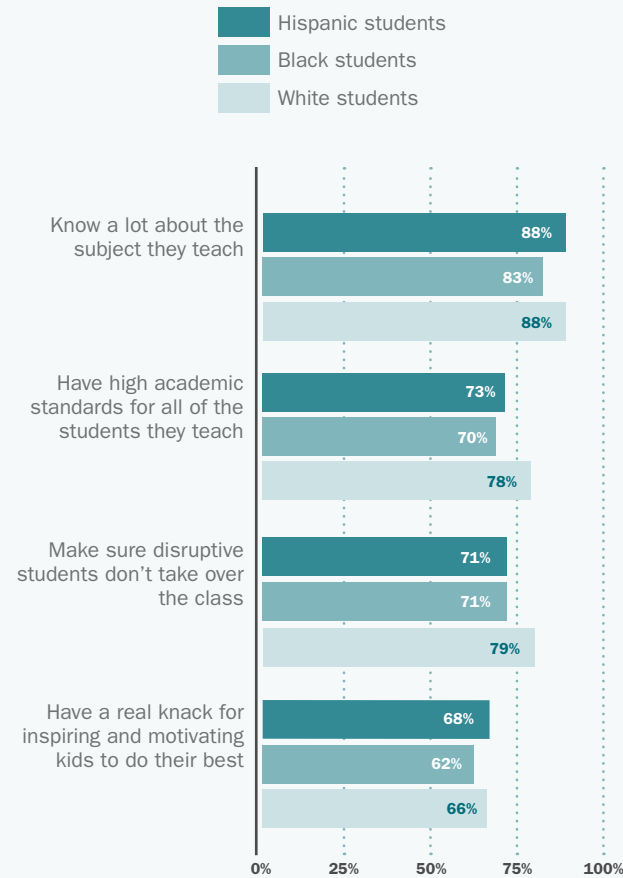


Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**Finding Seven:** Hispanic middle school and high school students, like other students nationwide, voice many positive views about their schools and teachers.

**Most Hispanic students give their schools and teachers good ratings.**

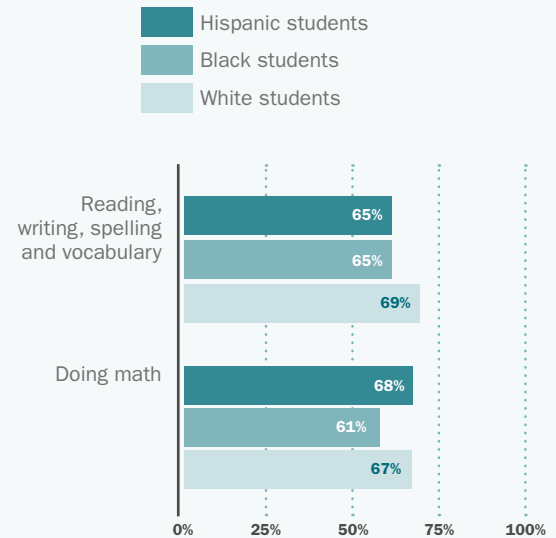
Percent of students who say “all” or “almost all” of their teachers:



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**Most Hispanic students, like other students, say they are learning a lot in school.**

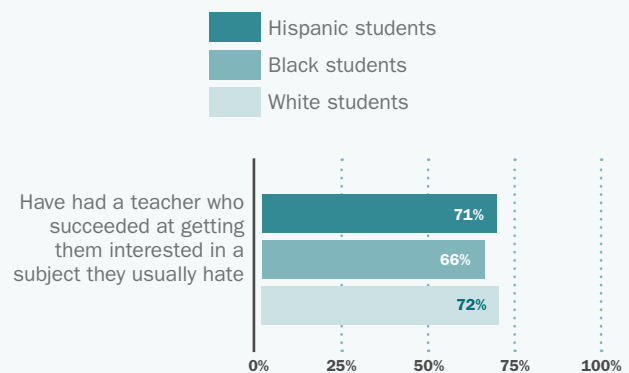
Percent of students who say they have learned “a lot” when it come to:



Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

**Most students, regardless of racial or ethnic background, say they've had a teacher who succeeded in getting them to like a subject they hadn't enjoyed before.**

Percent of students who say they:



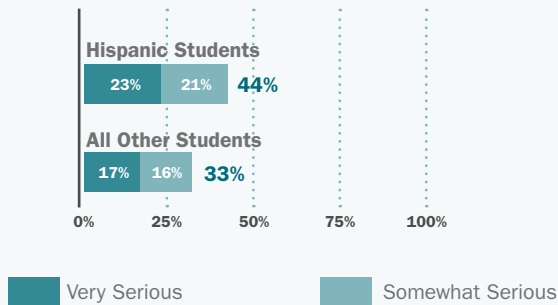
Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.



**Finding Eight:** However, Hispanic students confirm many of the key problems their parents see in local schools.

**Many Hispanic students say that dropping out of school is a serious problem in their school.**

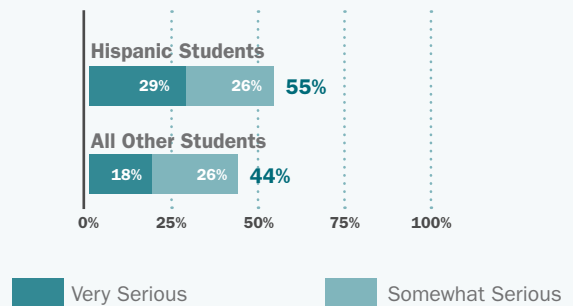
Percent who say that too many students dropping out is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Hispanic students are also more likely to say that cutting class is a serious problem in their school.**

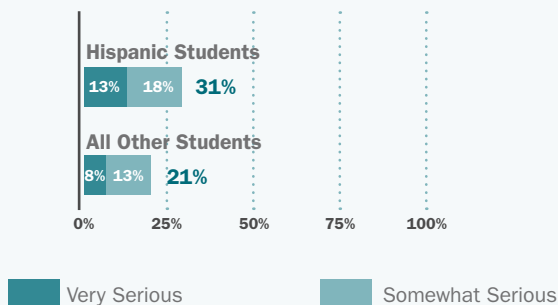
Percent who say that too many kids cutting class and ditching school is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Nearly a third of Hispanic students say there is not enough emphasis on basics in their schools.**

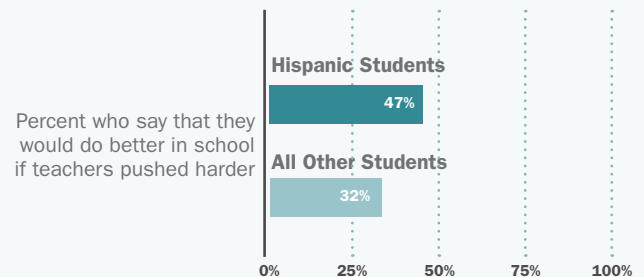
Percent who say that not enough emphasis on basics is a “very serious” to “somewhat serious” problem:



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

**Almost half say they could do better in school if their teachers pushed them harder.**

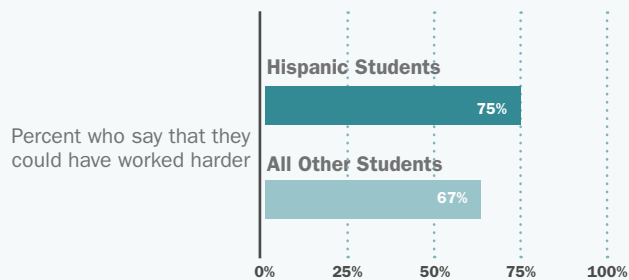
When it comes to academics, do you think you would do better in school if your teachers pushed you harder, do you think you would do worse or would it not make much difference?



Source: “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

## Young Hispanic adults say they could have worked harder and paid more attention in high school.

Thinking over your high school years, would you say that you worked hard to learn as much as you should have, or do you think you could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder?

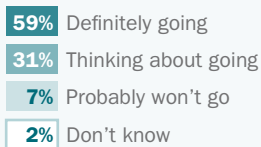
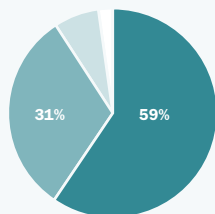


Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

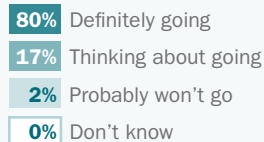
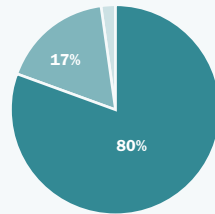
## Although most Hispanic high school students say they are "definitely" going to college, they are less likely to say this than other students.

Thinking about your future plans, are you definitely planning to go to college, are you thinking about going to college or do you think you probably won't go to college?

Hispanic Students



All Other Students



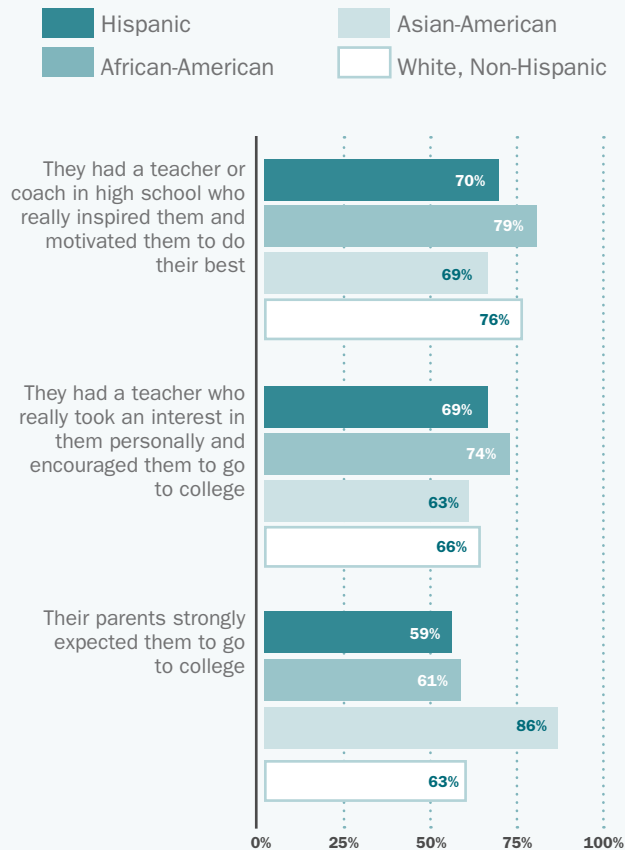
Source: "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.



**Finding Nine:** Most Hispanic young adults say their parents and teachers encouraged them to go to college and that their friends respect people with college degrees. Even so, they are considerably less likely to have friends who are going to college.

**Most young Hispanics say they received a lot of encouragement to go to college.**

Percent of young adults who say that:

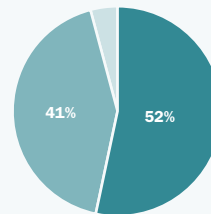


Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

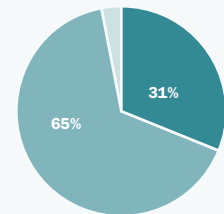
**Young Hispanics are even more likely than other young adults to say their friends are impressed by people with college degrees.**

In your circle of friends, do you think most people are really impressed by someone who graduates from college, is it something they look down on or is it just something routine and expected?

Hispanic Young Adults



All Other Young Adults

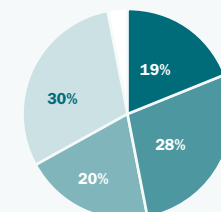


Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

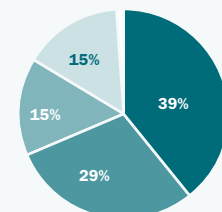
**However, they are twice as likely to say "only a few" or "none" of their friends are in college.**

In your circle of friends, how many would you say are going to college or have gone to college?

Hispanic Young Adults



All Other Young Adults

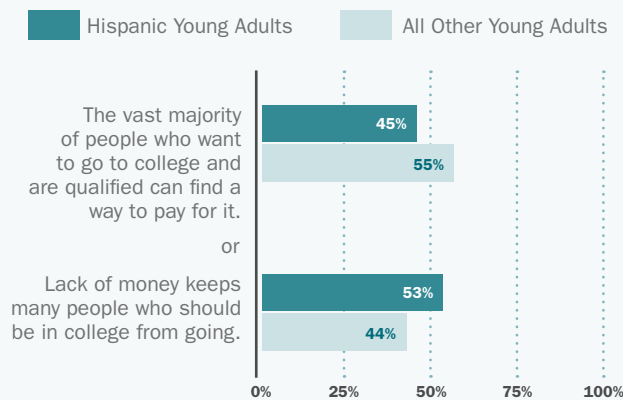


Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

**Finding Ten:** Hispanic young adults are also more likely to voice concerns about getting enough money to go to college.

**Less than half of Hispanic young adults believe that qualified students can find a way to pay for college.**

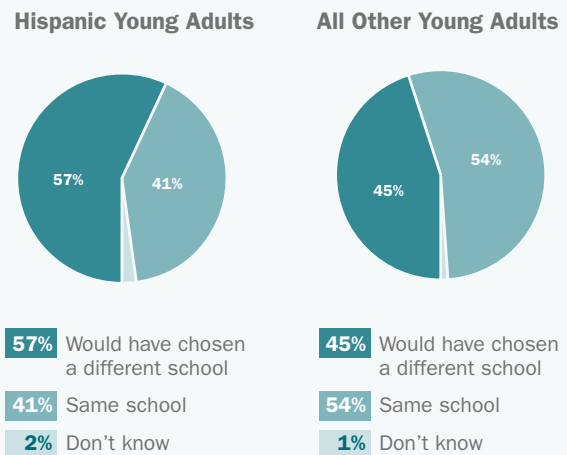
Which comes closer to your view?



Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

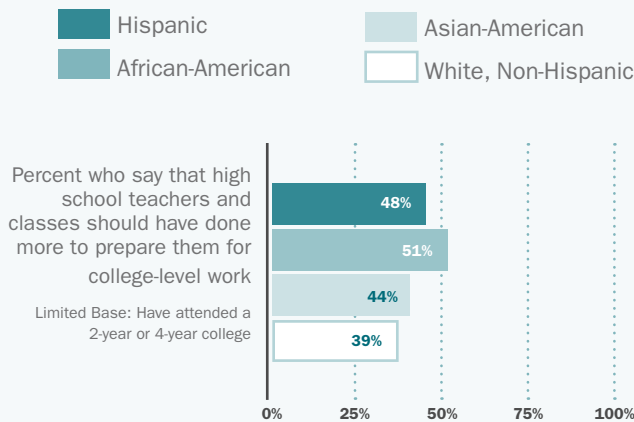
**Over half of young Hispanics who go to college say they would have gone to a different college or university if money hadn't been an issue.**

If financial concerns were not an issue, would you have chosen a different school to go to after high school?



Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

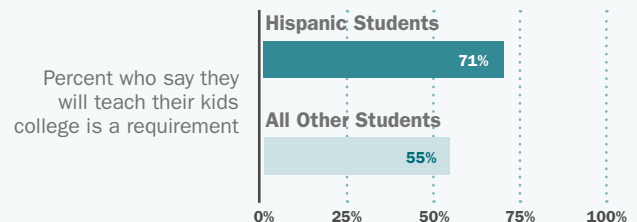
**Hispanic and African-American young adults are more likely to say that they could have been better prepared for college.**



Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.

**Hispanic young adults are substantially more likely to say they will teach their own children that going to college is a requirement.**

If you have children, do you think you will teach them that going to college is a requirement, that they can get along without it or will you leave it up to them?



Source: "Life After High School," Public Agenda 2005.





## Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials both from political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning website, [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org), offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Twice nominated for the prestigious Webby award for best political site, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

### Public Agenda

6 East 39th Street  
New York, NY 10016

t (212) 686.6610 f (212) 889.3461

1100 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 1090  
Washington, DC 20005

t (202) 292.1020 f (202) 775.8835

[www.PublicAgenda.org](http://www.PublicAgenda.org)

This report was commissioned by the IBM International Foundation.

