



Keeping Our Edge: Hispanic Americans Speak on Education and Competitiveness

Conducted For
ETS

By Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.
&
The Winston Group

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From May 22 to June 8, 2006, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., and The Winston Group conducted a national survey among 1,215 respondents nationwide, including 703 members of the general public (123 Hispanics) and 512 parents of K-12 students (301 parents of public high school students), and among 150 high school administrators, 150 high school teachers, 231 public high school students, 151 college faculty, and 151 business and opinion leaders. At the 95% confidence level, the data's margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points among all adults, and it is higher among smaller populations and subgroups. For Hispanics, the margin of error is ± 8.8 percentage points.

Like Americans in general, Hispanic Americans recognize the important role that public schools play in contributing to our nation's achievements, and they are concerned about our ability to remain competitive unless our schools improve and challenge students more. Despite major reform efforts at the national and state levels, Hispanic Americans give our schools mediocre ratings at best. They feel strongly that America's schools must do a better job when it comes to preventing students from dropping out and raising academic standards, particularly in math and science, to ensure that high school graduates are prepared for college and for the technology-driven jobs in the modern economy. A majority of Hispanic Americans expect that if we do not make changes in our schools, the economy will suffer within the next 10 years.

In many instances throughout the survey, the views of Hispanic Americans closely resemble those of non-Hispanic Americans generally:

- Fifty-one percent of Hispanic Americans say that the nation's K-12 public schools need major changes or an overhaul, while 47% say that they work pretty well now or should basically be kept the same. These results are similar to those among all non-Hispanic Americans, who are divided at 53% favoring major changes or an overhaul, and 45% favoring the status quo.
- Hispanic Americans also align with the entire adult population on their views of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal education reform law. Forty-four percent of Hispanic Americans and 43% of the general public have a favorable impression of NCLB, while 38% of Hispanic Americans and 41% of the general public have an unfavorable impression of it.
- When it comes to rating specific aspects of the public schools, Hispanic Americans, like the general public, are well aware of the system's flaws. Seventy-six percent of Hispanics say that the public schools are coming up short or falling behind when it comes to engaging bored students and preventing students from dropping out. Seventy-four percent believe schools should support struggling students and prevent students from dropping out. And 73% believe

schools should equip students to compete with other young people around the world for technology-driven jobs.

Hispanic Americans diverge somewhat from the general public on math and science education, but they make the same broad statement about the importance of math and science to student success and to the nation's ability to compete in the world.

- When asked which skills taught in high school will be the most important to America's ability to compete in the global economy, a 32% plurality of Hispanic Americans say math, science, and technology skills. Among the general public, 40% say math, science, and technology skills will be the most important.
- Nevertheless, Hispanics are more likely than the general public to say that students should take the most advanced math and science courses available (92% among Hispanics versus 84% among the general public). They are also more likely to say that what they learned in their high school math and science classes is important to their lives after high school (75% versus 71%).
- Hispanic Americans are far more likely than the general public to say they wish they had taken more challenging math and science classes in high school, 80% versus 60%.
- Sixty-eight percent of Hispanics, compared with just 44% of all Americans nationwide believe the following statement is a very convincing reason for students to take the most advanced math and science courses possible: "If students do not improve their skills in math and science, they may be the first generation in the United States to be worse off than their parents."

Hispanic Americans are also more likely than the general public to favor proposals that push for higher academic standards.

- Ninety-two percent of Hispanics favor developing more academically rigorous standards for high school with greater emphasis on college preparatory classes, honors classes, and college-level Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, compared with 87% of the general public.
- Eighty-seven percent of Hispanics favor making sure that students are mastering the core subject areas by requiring students to pass a statewide graduation test before they can receive a high school diploma, compared with 81% of Americans nationwide.

Hispanic Americans believe that the status quo must change if America is to remain a leader in the global economy. Fifty-five percent say that if America's high schools have not changed 25 years from now, American

competitiveness will suffer (76% say the impact will be substantially or moderately negative). Among the general public, 48% say that the status quo will imperil U.S. competitiveness (73% very or somewhat negative impact). Like their fellow citizens, Hispanic Americans believe that it is time for everyone involved with public education to dramatically increase their efforts to ensure that students get the most out of their public education. They are eager to embrace a variety of reforms and are demanding that policymakers and education experts step up and lead by identifying which reform approaches will be most effective at improving our public schools.

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