



## On Hispanic Education:

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# Effective schools for Hispanics

Research on effective schools has the potential of playing a significant role in the education of low-income and educationally disadvantaged Hispanic students. It is important, therefore, that Hispanics be familiar with some of the findings from effective schools research and how such research applies to schools, administrators, teachers, and the learning environment.

To familiarize ourselves with effective schools research it is helpful, therefore, to examine five of the characteristics of "effective schools" and to consider these characteristics in determining the effectiveness of our schools in educating our Hispanic children. Five characteristics of effective schools are as follows: a) greater parental involvement, b) strong and effective administrative and instructional leadership, c) emphasis on the acquisition of basic and higher order skills, d) a safe and orderly school environment that is conducive to learning, and e) continuous assessment and evaluation of the students and the educational program. Let's examine these characteristics.

It has been found that the greater the amount of parent involvement, the greater the achievement of their sons and daughters. Parents who consistently showed concern for their children's school achievement and who had high expectations of their children were rewarded with higher achieving children. Such parental concern is especially important in the early years of a child's education. But such concern and expectations must be **communicated** by the parent to the child. It was found in a dropout study, for example, that Hispanic students dropping out of school or not dropping out of school was significantly influenced by whether or not they simply **talked** to their parents about school! Parents who communicated with their children stood to have fewer dropouts!

Research has also shown that achievement of students is affected by parents who have been taught methods of increasing their children's intellectual development, such as positive reinforcement or doing an overview of a task before undertaking the work. Schools that invest time, money, and effort, therefore, in helping Hispanic parents help their children, stand to have a good return on their investment and a lower dropout rate for Hispanic students. It has been found additionally, that parents who did volunteer or tutoring or paraprofessional work in schools, contributed to higher achievement by their children. Finally, anything that parents can do to supplement classroom instruction and thereby increase time on task or quality of understanding by their children will result in higher achievement in school for their children.

Effective schools have been found to have strong and effective administrative and instructional leaders, i.e., principals, teachers, and counselors. Both principals and teachers demonstrated high expectations of students and these high expectations were modeled in front of and persuasively communicated to students and their parents. Principals and teachers who had high expectations of their students, including the belief that all

children can learn under appropriate conditions, and who strongly believed that their students could attain the academic objectives of the school, tended to have more successful schools. Principal/teacher collaboration in setting and accounting for higher achievement outcomes was found to be a key characteristic of successful schools. Principals who promoted more teacher inservice to increase teacher skills necessary for higher student achievement also showed greater program success.

Emphasis on the acquisition by students of basic and greater order skills was also found to be a sign of effective schools. Effective teachers believed and understood that their fundamental role was to instruct their students in a properly sequenced curriculum, and they believed that teaching or reteaching the curriculum content until the student mastered the content was important. Effective schools emphasized the mastery of basic skills in the early grades; in later grades, effective schools emphasized the use of basic skill to learn higher order tasks. In the lower grades, effective schools used methods which resulted in very low error rates and much praise; in later grades, effective schools incorporated higher cognitive level learning activities with more challenge but continued success.

A safe and orderly school environment that is conducive to learning was of particular importance in effective schools. Such schools were characterized by the creation of a value for order, respect for authority, genuine and observable respect and caring for individuals, and an emphasis on the instructional mission of the school. Classroom management techniques as practiced by teachers resulted in maximizing learning and minimizing disruptions that required disciplinary action. Such practices and norms in schools increased achievement, improved student attendance, and reduced delinquency.

Finally, effective schools conducted continuous assessment and evaluation of the students and the educational program. In effective schools, for example, there was the expectation that all teachers, not just beginning teachers, continued to improve instructional practice through continuous assessment, analysis and evaluation of instructional practices (Cohen, 1938). In addition, and especially in the case of academically at-risk students, effective schools used achievement test scores, age- and grade-level performance assessment, and other devices to constantly monitor student performance and achievement. In the case of limited-English-proficient Hispanic students, such rigorous evaluation and assessment cannot be stressed enough.

As we consider the above findings, we owe it to ourselves as Hispanics to make sure that schools with educationally disadvantaged Hispanic students do everything possible to possess the characteristics of "effective schools."

Familiarity with findings from effective schools research will help Hispanics to work with schools that have not bridged the gap between research and practice in the classroom. Bridging this gap is important for Hispanics if we are to have schools that demonstrate success rather than failure in teaching Hispanics.