



— On Hispanic Education: —

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The graduation of Hispanic students

What learning institutions in Michigan need to do is to account for the number of Hispanics graduated. Graduation statistics would be more telling than anything else about our schools' efforts to help or not help Hispanics complete their education. How well or not we are graduating Hispanics from Michigan schools in the two levels of K-12 education and postsecondary education, can be seen in part by examining two reports put out in 1986 by the Michigan State Board of Education. One of the reports is entitled **Hispanic School Dropouts and Hispanic Students Performance on the MEAP Test**, and the second report is entitled **Report on Minorities, Handicappers, and Women in Michigan's Colleges and Universities**.

The Hispanic dropout study involved six high schools in six school districts; three of the schools were in large urban districts and the other three were in smaller suburban districts. Average dropout rates for Hispanics in grades 9-12 for the six high schools in the study were as follows: Adrian, 13.2%; Buena Vista, 15.16%; Lansing (Eastern High School), 13.93%; Grand Rapids (Union High School), 10.53%; West Ottawa, 8.95%; and Detroit (Western High School), 17.96%. Looking, respectively, at the six counties containing those six schools revealed, however, a much higher percentage of Hispanics over age 24 who had not completed high school: Lenawee, 64.5%; Saginaw, 59.1%; Ingham, 49.0%; Kent, 53.9%; Ottawa, 70.6%; and Wayne, 51.9%. The more serious county-wide dropout rates are cause for even greater concern.

The dropout study report also documents how Hispanic students from the above school districts performed in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests relative to all students in the state. The MEAP tests "acceptable performance" in reading and math in grades 4, 7, and 10. Looking at the reading and math test results, respectively, for all grades: only 56% of Hispanics attained acceptable performance in reading as compared to 79% of all students statewide; and only 55% of Hispanics attained acceptable performance in math as compared to 70% of all students statewide. The differences in the above percentages between Hispanics and other students, measure to a certain degree the discrepancies in educational equity for Hispanics in grades K-12 in Michigan.

The report on minorities in Michigan public colleges and universities focuses on enrollments and headcounts. Between 1976 and 1984 Hispanic enrollment in Michigan colleges increased from .9% to 1.1%, but there was a 6.8% drop for Hispanic enrollments between 1980 and 1984 even though their high school graduation rates increased 3.1%. In addition, in the past five years the community college enrollments of Hispanics declined 35% in Michigan. The report also states that the proportion of Hispanic students in all three major research universities (The University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University) increased, but Hispanics still comprise less than 2% at each institution. The report gave no data on the bottom line: how many Hispanics were

graduated from Michigan colleges and universities? Perhaps there were too few to mention.

This is why graduation statistics from school districts with high concentrations of Hispanic students, as well as all colleges and universities in Michigan need to be collected. Furthermore, these statistics need to be analyzed and compared to help determine what those schools may be doing right or wrong. Examination of schools and colleges that report increases from one year to the next in the number of graduating Hispanic students might reveal interventions, programs, or strategies being used by these institutions which positively impact on the graduation of Hispanic students.

Those institutions that are effective in their graduation of Hispanics might also provide expertise and/or technical assistance to the not-so-effective institutions. Long-range studies of learning institutions and their ability to graduate Hispanic students might reveal useful qualitative and quantitative data. Such data might affect statewide policies and practices in school districts with high concentrations of Hispanic students as well as in all colleges and universities in Michigan.

It is heartening to know that the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Hispanic Education is doing follow-up work to the Hispanic dropout study by undertaking a Hispanic dropout prevention study. This study will examine dropout-prone Hispanic students from some of the school districts that participated in the previous study and then attempt to measure the effectiveness of strategies intended to diminish or eradicate the dropout rate. The study, however, has limited funding and, therefore, limited participation of schools, so this may also limit the potential of the study to solve the Hispanic dropout problem in Michigan. Nevertheless, the study may reveal tried and tested approaches for dealing with dropout-prone Hispanic student. These strategies may in turn help increase the number of college-bound age Hispanic students for our colleges.

Given the percentage of Hispanics nationwide who are of college-bound age, levels of Hispanic enrollment in postsecondary education are below proportional levels. Hispanic students nationwide constitute only 4.2% of the 12 million plus college and university students in the nation (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1984). Furthermore, postsecondary enrollment gains by Hispanics nationwide in the last ten years were mainly in two-year institutions, with Michigan being one exception. Exacerbating the problem is an even higher dropout rate for Hispanics in college than in high school.

To prevent these declines we will need greater communication, cooperation, and coordination by Michigan high schools with community colleges who in turn will need to do the same with four-year colleges and universities. Not until Michigan colleges and universities can attain a percentage of Hispanic students on their campuses that is proportional to the number of college-bound age Hispanics in the U.S. can they relax their efforts to find, get, keep, and graduate Hispanic students.