

# The Education Status of the Hispanic Community in Delaware

## An Issue Brief Presented by the Governor's Consortium on Hispanic Affairs

In Collaboration with the University of Delaware Center for Community Research and Service

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Delaware is quickly becoming more diverse with the increasing population growth of people from a variety of Hispanic cultures. In fact, between 2000 and 2007, the Hispanic population in Delaware grew by 50%, much faster than the national rate of 29%. In order to identify and address the needs of Hispanic Delawareans, Governor Ruth Ann Minner established the Governor's Consortium on Hispanic Affairs. The Consortium began its work in 2007 by contracting with Bendixen & Associates (B&A) to conduct a comprehensive Delaware Hispanic Needs Assessment (DHNA) including: a statewide survey of over 800 Hispanic adults, in-depth interviews with community leaders, and focus groups with community members. Through the data gathered from the DHNA, the Consortium found that education was the most commonly cited barrier for Hispanics to economic opportunities and access to needed health services. Some of the underlying education issues within the community include: English language skills, high school drop-out, and access to career training. This issue brief presents key educational findings from the DHNA and from other government and nonprofit organizations.

### What are Key Issues Related to Education in Delaware's Hispanic Community?

**Adult Hispanics and Education** Educational attainment plays a substantial role in an individual's ability to succeed in life. However, within Delaware's Hispanic community, there are significant disparities related to education. The U.S. Census reports<sup>1</sup> that 44.1% of Delaware Hispanics over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma. Although this is similar to the national average for Hispanics (39.8%), the percentage of Delaware Hispanics without a high school diploma is significantly higher than that of the overall Delaware population (15.5%). The DHNA also found that educational achievement for

Hispanics is not the same across the state with Hispanics in New Castle County being more likely to have a high school diploma than those living in Lower Delaware (Kent & Sussex Counties) (71% vs. 29%).\*

Along with low high school completion rates, Delaware Hispanics are less likely than the overall Delaware population to attend college or attain a college degree. For instance, in 2006, more than half of Delawareans over the age of 25 had some college experience and 33.8% held a college degree, compared to Delaware Hispanics in the same age group, where less than a quarter had ever attended college and only 14.4% held a college degree.<sup>1</sup> Without a college education, many

Hispanics may find difficulty in economic advancement and upward mobility within the workforce.

**Table 1. A Comparison of Educational Attainment for Adults Ages 25 and Older<sup>1</sup>**

	U.S. All Races	U.S. Hispanics	Delaware All Races	Delaware Hispanics
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	6.5%	23.9%	4.8%	31.8%
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade - 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade (No Diploma)	9.4%	15.9%	9.7%	12.3%
High School Diploma/ GED	30.2%	28.1%	33.9%	31.1%
Some College	19.5%	14.6%	17.7%	9.4%
Associates Degree	7.4%	5.2%	6.9%	3.6%
Bachelor's Degree	17.1%	8.4%	16.4%	7.9%
Graduate/Prof. Degree	9.9%	3.9%	10.5%	2.9%

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Data from the DHNA\* indicate that many Delaware Hispanics who do not have a high school diploma experience economic hardships. For instance, 67.4% of Hispanics without a diploma or GED live in households that earn less than \$20,000 per year, and 39.4% are unemployed.

**Hispanic Youth and Education** While Delaware Hispanic adults are experiencing educational disparities, research indicates that Hispanic youth are also experiencing educational disparities in Delaware. Over the last ten years the number of Hispanic children in Delaware's schools has grown significantly with an overall increase of about 60% between the '97-'98 and '07-'08 school years.<sup>2</sup> This increase was most noticeable in Sussex County, where public schools saw a 73% increase in Hispanic students. Forty-four percent of Hispanic students enrolled in English language learner programming (ELL).<sup>3</sup>

While Hispanic students enhance the diversity of Delaware's public schools, data from the Department of Education show that they continue to experience significant achievement gaps. For instance, when examining the annual Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) scores, we find that across all test subjects, Hispanic ethnicity and limited English proficiency (LEP) are both associated with low testing scores.<sup>2</sup> Also troubling is the fact that Hispanic youth consistently have higher drop-out rates compared to other races with last year's dropout rate being 8.5%.<sup>4</sup>

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP)** In addition to disparities in educational attainment and achievement, another educational issue found within the Delaware Hispanic community is the large percentage of adults who are LEP. In fact, the DHNA indicates that 55.5% of Hispanic adults speak only or mostly Spanish. When comparing LEP Hispanics from the DHNA with those who are not LEP, the findings indicate that there are significant educational disparities for Hispanics who do not speak English. For instance, 54.3% of LEP Hispanics in the DHNA reported that they had less than a high school diploma, compared to 19.4% of English proficient Hispanics. Similarly, only 4.3% of LEP Hispanics report having a college degree, compared to 14.6% of non-LEP Hispanics. Overall, the majority (86.6%) of LEP Hispanics in the DHNA indicated that they are interested in taking English classes. However, many government-funded ELL programs are held at public facilities, such as local colleges or public schools. The DHNA found that Delaware Hispanics who are LEP Hispanics do not generally turn to the government for sources of information for their family's needs.

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## **What are Barriers to Education in the Hispanic Community?**

**Socioeconomic Status** When considering the educational success of Hispanic children in Delaware, the DHNA indicates that there may be several social and economic barriers that are challenging Hispanics' ability to succeed in school or have high educational attainment. One of the more significant barriers that Hispanics experience is the high percentage of Delaware Hispanics who experience low socioeconomic status. As stated earlier, Hispanics without a high school education are more likely to have low household incomes and be unemployed compared to those with a high school education. Hispanic adults with low-incomes may be focused on obtaining and maintaining employment in order to meet their family's needs and therefore unable to meet the demands of both employment and school. For instance, while 86.6% of Hispanics with limited English proficiency indi-

*We have to educate the parents so that they are more encouraging of their children. This is hard because they have to work and they really don't see a lot of opportunities for higher education so they become disinterested. Outreach programs need to reinforce the value of education to both children and parents.*

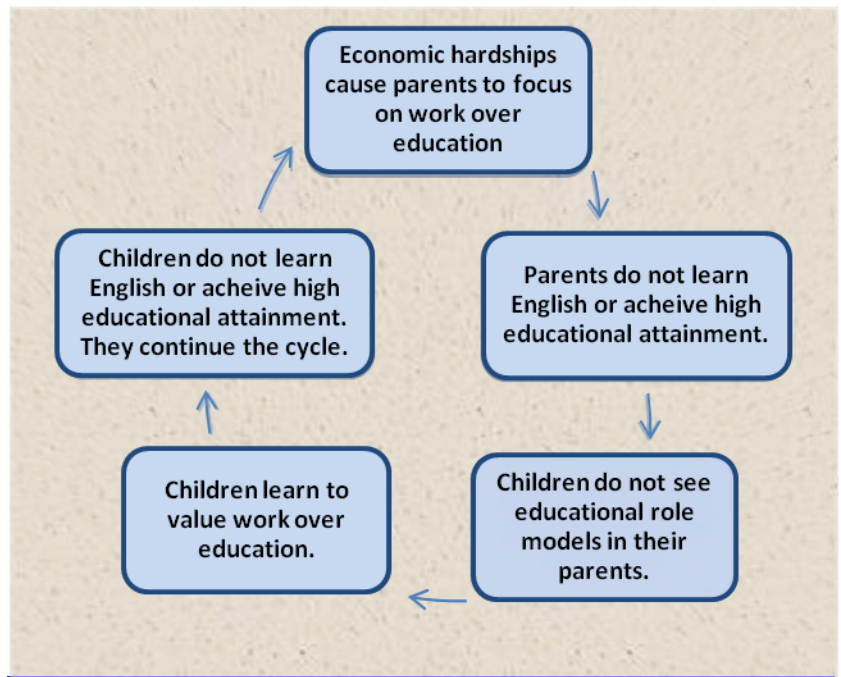
*- Non-profit leader*

cated that they are interested in taking English classes, more than half reported that they have the time to attend classes.\*

Economic hardships experienced by Hispanic families may also influence their children's ability to succeed in school. Examining Hispanic adults who have children living in the household in Delaware\*, the DHNA reports that 32.8% are unemployed and 45.7% report having household incomes of less than \$20,000 per year. The Delaware Department of Education also reports that low-income status is associated with lower testing scores on the DSTP,<sup>4</sup> which suggests that many Hispanic students may have difficulty in achieving high scores on the DSTP. One reason for this may be that Hispanic families who struggle financially may not have the resources at home

that are needed to help their children succeed, such as books, a computer, or transportation. In addition to educational achievement, the most commonly cited reason Hispanic adults surveyed through the DHNA gave for Hispanic youth's decision to drop out of school was that Hispanic youth need to work.\* Community members and leaders participating in the DHNA report that economic hardships experienced by families may result in Hispanic parents emphasizing values of work in their children and de-emphasizing education. Figure 1 proposed ways in which economic hardships may influence children's low-educational attainment and limited English proficiency. \*

Figure 1. The Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Educational



**Limited Parental Involvement** Parental involvement in their child's education is paramount for their success. This is especially true for Hispanic school-age children, who have notably experienced disparities in the U.S. education system and for pre-school age Hispanic children, who are continuously underrepresented in early childhood education programs, such as pre-school and Head Start.<sup>5</sup> However, given that many Hispanic adults surveyed through the DHNA reported that they are not proficient in English and have low household incomes, a large number of Delaware Hispanics may find that they are unable to help their children learn English, develop literacy skills, and navigate the school system to advocate for their children.

**Lack of Support** In addition to the barriers of low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and limited parental involvement, Hispanic youth may also experience educational challenges presented by current educational systems that do not meet their cultural needs. In fact, after economic reasons, Hispanic adults were most likely to attribute youth's dropout rates to "lack of support," (26%) and "discrimination" (13%).\* Research on Hispanic youth has demonstrated that learning Spanish alone is not sufficient for educational professionals to reach students and their families, but there needs to be a strong understanding of Hispanic culture.<sup>6</sup> Also, research has indicated that even well-intended teachers and administrators may unconsciously be influenced by stereotypes of Hispanics when assessing students' abilities.<sup>7</sup>

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## Where Do We Go from Here?

Given current economic and employment trends, it is commonly thought that education is the gateway for economic opportunity. However, there are many educational disparities within the Hispanic community, such as the large number of Delaware Hispanics experiencing barriers in developing the knowledge and language skills needed to succeed. By improving English language skills and educational attainment in Delaware's Hispanic community, it may be possible for more Hispanic Delawareans to obtain higher wage work, earn higher incomes, and improve their children's ability to succeed in school. In order to address the many educational issues within the Hispanic community, the Consortium supports the development of innovative strategies that involve leaders from the public, for-profit and nonprofit sectors statewide. Some specific action steps that the Consortium proposes in order to expand educational opportunities for Hispanics across the lifespan include:

- Increased partnerships and activities that engage Hispanic parents in their children's education. Such activities may include: literacy and ELL programs that involve the entire family and collaborations between schools and Hispanic community organizations that facilitate parental involvement with their child's school.
- Increased linguistic and cultural competency of teachers and educational professionals within Delaware's schools from pre-K to grade 12. Activities that could facilitate this may include: educational professionals engaging in cultural competence training, incentive programs for Delaware teachers to learn Spanish, and recruitment programs to employ Hispanics within Delaware schools.
- Increased access to ELL classes through programmatic changes, such as extended hours, diverse locations, inter-organizational partnerships, and greater use of instructional technology.
- Collaborations between the Governor's Consortium on Hispanic Affairs and Delaware's Vision 2015, a comprehensive statewide plan that aims at improving access to educational opportunities and achieving high quality education for Delaware youth.

While flexible and innovative educational opportunities may make it possible for Hispanics to develop English proficiency and high educational attainment, economic barriers may continue to present challenges for Hispanics who are interested in learning English or furthering their education. As a result, it is important for the public and private sectors to create support systems that allow Hispanic Delawareans to focus less on economic survival and more on improving their educational status. By allowing Hispanic adults to focus on educational attainment and English proficiency, they can serve as better educational role models for Hispanic youth, thus breaking the intergenerational cycle of de-emphasized educational values as previously described. With increased cooperation across sectors across the state, Delaware currently has the opportunity to set an exemplary model for Hispanic education for the nation.

### Notes:

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau. (2006) American Community Survey 2006 Data Tables. Washington D.C.: Author.
  - 2 Delaware Department of Education. (2008). Delaware state education state report card 2006-2007. Dover, DE: Author.
  - 3 Delaware Department of Education. (2007). Annual report of Delaware's English language learners, staff, and programs. Dover, DE: Author.
  - 4 Delaware Department of Education (2008b). DE School Enrollment Reports. Dover, DE: Author.
  - 5 Barnett, W.S. & Yarosz, D.J. (2004). Who goes to preschool and why does it matter? [Factsheet]. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
  - 6 Bohon, S. A., MacPherson, H. & Atilas, J. H. (2005). Educational barriers to new Latinos in Georgia, *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 4(1), 43-58.
  - 7 Edl, H.M., Jones, M.H. & Estell, D.B. (2008). Ethnicity and English proficiency: Teacher perceptions of academic and interpersonal competence in European American and Latino students. *School Psychology Review*, 37(1), 38-45.
  - 8 For more information on Vision 2015, please visit [www.vision2015delaware.org](http://www.vision2015delaware.org).
- \* Statistics derived from: Bendixen & Associates (2008). Delaware Hispanic needs' assessment. Coral Gables, FL: Author. (This report to the Governor's Consortium on Hispanic Affairs is available at [www.delcf.org](http://www.delcf.org)). All statistics used from this report were found to be significant at or above the 95 percent confidence level.