Hispanics and education II: October 2013, Vol. 4, No. 2

Highlights

Economic development and education work hand in hand. Students graduating from Idaho schools will become the skilled employees, entrepreneurs and innovators who help our economy grow . . . . Education is the key to higher-paying jobs.

- Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter (August 15, 2013)

Hispanic students are the fastest growing demographic group in Idaho’s education system. The quality of tomorrow’s workforce depends on these students succeeding in school.

This report is the second in our series of policy briefs on Hispanics and education in Idaho. Here, we focus on Hispanics’ educational aspirations, their decision to attend college, and their experiences with and achievement in science and math. Our major findings point to the need for programs and policies that help Hispanic students achieve their highest potential:

- Hispanic enrollment growth is outpacing non-Hispanic growth in Idaho’s public schools, colleges and universities.  

- Hispanic students have high aspirations for completing a postsecondary degree. Almost two-thirds expect to complete a 4-year college degree.

- Despite their aspirations, Hispanic students do not perform as well as non-Hispanics on state achievement tests, especially in science.

- When it comes to experiences with science and math, Hispanic 7th graders are similar to their non-Hispanic peers. By 10th grade, however, Hispanic students are less likely to have positive experiences.

- Hispanic parents want to have more time to be involved in their children’s education, but many lack confidence in their ability to help with science and math homework.

Data sources

The main data source for this report is the University of Idaho’s Micron STEM Education Research Initiative, a 5-year study of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education in Idaho: www.uidaho.edu/research/STEM/micronstemed. Here, we highlight results from surveys of 7th and 10th grade students and their parents, and from a general statewide survey. Additional data sources are listed at the end of this report.

For previous issues of our policy brief series on Hispanics, see www.uidaho.edu/IdahoataGlance.

www.uidaho.edu/communitypartnerships

LINKING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES
WITH UNIVERSITY RESOURCES
Most Hispanic students expect to get a postsecondary degree

Idaho’s Hispanic 10th graders have very high aspirations for educational attainment beyond high school:

◆ 64% expect to complete at least a 4-year college degree.
◆ Only 1% say they do not plan to finish high school. 
◆ For Hispanic students to achieve these aspirations, they need more information about how to apply to and afford college.

◆ Fewer than half of Hispanic 10th graders and their parents are confident that they know how to apply for college—only 30% and 49%, respectively—or financial aid—only 25% and 45%, respectively.

Students of all races and ethnicities also need resources to help them stay in college. Only one of every four Idaho students who goes to college completes a degree. Research identifies several reasons: few links between school work and job opportunities, the cost of college, balancing school and work at the same time, and lack of academic readiness.

Many considerations influence the decision to attend college

When students think about whether they will attend college, high school grades and scores on college admission exams play a larger role in their decision than the rising cost of college tuition. The most important considerations are: high school grades, scores on college entrance exams, availability of financial aid, and the cost of college. Where differences exist between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, Hispanic students and parents are more likely to say these considerations are extremely or fairly important to their college-going decision.

Tuition is rising across the nation, making it harder for students to afford college. Almost all parents in Idaho, Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike, include grants and scholarships as part of their plan for paying for college—96% versus 88%, respectively. Unfortunately, state-funded, need-based aid is especially low in Idaho: only $63 per undergraduate student annually in 2008, compared to $611 nationally.

Most parents plan to supplement scholarships and grants with other sources. These include student loans (71%), student income from a job while attending college (69%), and parent or guardian investments (60%).

Why is STEM education important?

STEM occupations are expected to grow faster than other occupations in Idaho. In general, STEM jobs have good benefits and opportunities for career growth. Average wages in Idaho’s STEM occupations were roughly twice as high as for all other occupations in 2011. By 2018, 90% of STEM jobs will require at least some postsecondary education. Thus, a key strategy for increasing access to good paying jobs is to focus on STEM education. Hispanics have been underrepresented in the nation’s STEM workforce since at least the 1970s.

Hispanic students face challenges related to math and science education

While the majority of Idaho’s 7th and 10th graders like math (68%) and science (75%), only one-third report it’s fairly or extremely important to have a job that uses a lot of either one when they become an adult.

When it comes to attitudes about math and science, 7th grade Hispanic students are similar to their non-Hispanic peers. By 10th grade, however, Hispanic students are:

◆ less likely to say they like math and science;
◆ more likely to say math is harder for them than for other students;
◆ less comfortable asking questions in class;
◆ less likely to feel they can get extra help in math or science outside of class time; and
◆ less likely to feel they can get help with math or science homework at home.

Each year, Idaho’s public school students take the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). ISAT scores show lower proficiency among Hispanic students in all subjects, especially science.

◆ Only 43% of Hispanic 5th, 7th and 10th graders are proficient or advanced in science, compared to 72% of non-Hispanics.

Unfortunately, Hispanic parents feel unprepared to help and feel they do not have the time they need to be involved in their children’s education.

◆ Hispanic parents are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic parents to strongly agree that they wish they had more time to be involved in their child’s education—48% vs. 19% for parents of 10th graders.
◆ However, Hispanic parents are much more likely than non-Hispanic parents to strongly agree that they lack the knowledge to help with math and science homework—51% vs. 26% for math, and 44% vs. 13% for science.

** The science ISAT is administered in grades 5, 7 & 10, so science scores apply to students in those grades only.