

WHY HISPANIC STUDENTS ARE FALLING BEHIND

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Bachelor of Arts in Education

California State University, Long Beach

December, 2002

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

Master of Education in Cross Cultural Teaching

at

National University

April, 2004

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

CROSSCULTURAL TEACHING

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The purpose of this research is to reveal reasons why Hispanic students fail and to develop possible solutions to this growing crisis. A multitude of data reflects Hispanic youth achievement as inferior when compared to their peers of other ethnicity. Both Caucasian and African youth achieve a higher level of education when compared to their Hispanic counterparts. Studies show the academic deficiencies of Hispanic youth in North America. Numerous reports indicate poverty, English language acquisition, and traditional customs as problematic factors. However, it is with this dissertation that I assert the cause of such occurrences is a social manifestation based upon need and necessity. A majority of Hispanic parents are relatively new immigrants and lack the necessary communication skills and academic skills to assist their children in academic endeavors. Many Mexican immigrants have attended school up to third grade. An overview of how children fail and the determinants of their failure will bring cause to the apparent difficulties that Hispanic youth must face.

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GLOSSARY

African American. A person who is a descendent of Africa or identify themselves as such because of race or ethnicity.

Asian American. A person who is a descendent of Asia or identify themselves as such because of race or ethnicity.

Below Poverty. Families and persons whose total individual or family income is less than the poverty threshold specified for the applicable family size, age of householder, and number of related children under 18 present.

Bilingual Education. Education in more than one language.

Cal Works. CalWORKs is a welfare program that gives cash aid and services to eligible needy California families.

Excel Program. Program that recognizes students who are high achievers and places students in homogenous classroom settings.

Food Stamps. State aid to assist families or individuals with limited income.

Hispanic. A person who is a descendent of Mexico or other Latin American countries, or identify themselves as such because of race of ethnicity.

Poverty. An individual or family who do not have enough money to care for their basic needs: food, housing, and clothing.

Reading Recovery. A program developed to assist in fast-paced reading instruction to improve student reading levels when behind one or more grade levels.

Title I. Identification of schools with lower achievement and/or limited English and provides additional funding to assist in academic improvement.

White. A person who is a descendent of people from Europe or who identifies themselves as such because of race or ethnicity.

Chapter 1

EL ÉXITO PARA TODO

Statement of the Problem

Hispanic students are among the lowest performing ethnic groups (State and Nation). According to the California Department of Finance, only 25% graduate from high school, 18% attend some college, 6% receive a Bachelors degree, and only 2% receive their Master's degrees. (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/CPS-2002.pdf>) According to Geneva, one in four Mexican immigrants age 15 to 17 is enrolled in high school. (Geneva, G., 2000, p. 17)

These are alarming numbers since the Hispanic population will match and surpass the White population by 2030. (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/projca.pdf>) In fact, in K-12 public schools there are already more Hispanic students than any other ethnicity including White (see Figure 1.1, page 18). (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/K12Ethtb.xls>)

As an educator in a school with primarily Hispanic students, I am interested in assisting Hispanic students, their parents, and relatives in academic and financial success in the United States. Working with Hispanic students; I have learned that many of the duties in the home interfere with those of academics. (Dresser, N. p. 50)

Background of Problem

The great social need of a change is necessary for two reasons; first, the Hispanic population is on a rise in California and by 2040; over 50% of the population in California will be Hispanic. The Hispanic population will increase by 154% over the next thirty-six years. (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/projca.pdf>)

Secondly, when comparing recent poverty levels and welfare programs, in 2040, California would need over \$4 billion dollars to maintain food stamp patrons.¹ (www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FoodStamps_194.htm) This would certainly bankrupt California.

These are the reasons to improve Hispanic students' academic achievements. Hispanic students have a higher rate of academic failure due to high absence rate, language barriers, and lack of parent education.

Increased funding is geared towards Title I schools assisting Hispanic students and the benefits are clear; however, they remain unsatisfactory. Poverty level is an overwhelming factor in Title I schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, Doc# 2003-02)

Areas of Study

Significance of the Project

According to demographics, Hispanics are not placed into higher paying positions. (www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ppl-165/slideshow/02show.ppt) Therefore, Hispanic students do not see their parents in high paying positions; therefore, they are exposed to hard work with little payoff and know only this when entering the workforce.

When comparing academic attainment across cultures and ethnicities, Hispanics are below White, Black, and Asian groups. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, Mini-Digest of Education Statistics) In fact, the gap between Black and Hispanic is so large that Hispanics are really in a class by itself.

Question

What can be done to increase the academic achievement of Hispanic Students?

Context

The school I am studying is located in Long Beach, California. The school is located in one of the lowest economic areas in Long Beach. One hundred percent of the students participate in the free

¹ Source: California Department of Social Services: Food Stamps and Department of Finance: Population Projections. Approximately 11 Million Hispanics in 2000 (1.58 billion spent on food stamps) and projected number of 28 Million in 2040. (28m/x = 11m/\$1.58b).

lunch program and are considered to be economically disadvantaged. According to recent Academic Performance Index Growth Report, the percentage of the student body is: Hispanic / Latino 68%, Asian 22%, African American 7%, Pacific Islander 1%, and White 1%. (api.cde.ca.gov/api2003/API/2003Grth_Sch.asp) Seventy-six percent of the student body is English language learners. (api.cde.ca.gov/api2003/API/2003Grth_Sch.asp)

Chapter 2

LA REVISIÓN DE LA LÍTERATURA

Introductory Paragraph

The purpose of this literature review is to examine literature written about Hispanic culture, academics, population increase, and economic outlook. Each topic will help to define the nature of need that the Hispanic population demands in the 21st century. After the review, it will be apparent that Hispanic people are in need of assistance, more so than any other ethnic population.

Framework

Poverty

According to recent findings, the poverty level of Hispanics is the lowest figures across all findings. (www.dss.cahwnwt.gov/foodstamps/FoodStampP_1719.htm) In fact, one-quarter of Hispanic children under age eighteen are living in poverty. (www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ppl-165/slideshow/02show.ppt) There are numerous programs available to assist families in need.

One program is food stamps. The percentage of the Hispanic population on food stamps is over 45%. (See Table 1.2, page 19) This is two times more than both the White and Black population. And with 69% of food stamp recipients also receiving Cal Works, it is certain to realize the extent of poverty this population encounters. (www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FoodStamps_194.htm)

Job Market

More than 70% of Hispanics in the United States earn \$35,000 per year, making nearly 21% of Hispanics live below the poverty level. For some Mexican immigrants, this wage is more money than they earned in Mexico. An immigrant construction worker said, “Where I came from I used to work ten hours for \$1.25... then I came here and they paid \$1.25 for eight hours - it was good.” (Takaki, R., 1993, p. 315) This is an example of the push-pull factors immigrants’ face when deciding to leave their country to the United States. While most Mexicans may feel they are earning top wage compared to

that they earned in Mexico, they earn the least annually when compared to other ethnic groups in United States. (See Figure 1.2, page 18)

In addition to receiving the least pay, Hispanics are employed as laborers or operators where they are usually risking more for less money. (www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ppl-165/slideshow/02show.ppt) This is nearly two times more than Whites in the same position.

Hispanics

Culture

The culture of the Hispanic people varies from region, country, and town; although, there is one commonality between all Hispanic people and that is the admiration for family. (Galarza, E., 1971) Galarza elaborates on his admiration and honor for family throughout his autobiography, “Barrio Boy,” and provides a valuable insight into the Mexican culture. Through a first hand account of what a family endures while moving from their native country into an unknown territory.

According to Dresser, Mexican family values dictate when a family member needs assistance the family members drop everything to assist. (Dresser, N., 1996, p. 50) Academic or work related matters are often set aside when the family unit experiences an emergency or event to rush to.

Academics

Conflicting accounts of values Mexican immigrants place on academics make it hard to concur whether academics is of importance to the culture or if it is the acculturation of Mexican immigrants that places academics as a value within their culture. According to Geneva, one out of four Mexican immigrants age 15 to 17 is enrolled in high school. (Geneva, G., 2000, p.17) This would truly account for the 25% high school graduation rate that we see from Hispanic students. (See Table 1.1, page 19)

Dresser states Mexican people value family over academic achievement. (Dresser, N., 1996, p. 50) Although, Galarza describes his influence to higher education through his grandmother’s influence. (Galarza, E., 1971, p. 93) Galarza may be a unique situation or cause to believe that education is important, but perhaps there are other factors influencing educational attainment, like financial constraints.

Population Increase

According to the California Department of Finance, the population by ethnicity indicated that the leading population in California is Hispanic. (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/CPS-2002.pdf>) In the next ten years, the Hispanic population will grow remarkably. By the year 2020, the population of Hispanics and Whites will be nearly equal. And yet, in another ten years, 2030, the Hispanic population will outnumber all other ethnicity groups in California. (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/projca.pdf>)

Hispanics' Education Barriers

High Absenteeism

During my student teaching, I was assigned to a school whose population consisted mainly of Hispanic students. One reoccurring issue was the students' attendance. Some students would disappear without any notification and would reappear several weeks later. The student would explain that they were in Mexico visiting family. Although there is very little literature examining absence rate at elementary level, this is an issue that many teachers have expressed.

At the elementary school I teach at, if a student would disappear in such a fashion or take an extended vacation, the student would lose their position in the school. This is due to the overpopulation of the school. At 1400 students, over 600 students are bussed to other schools and it is imperative that each desk is occupied by a student everyday. Most families are transients and move frequently from one school to another, in and out of the district causing a continuum of students entering and exiting the school.

Dresser noted that high absence rates among Hispanic students may occur for several reasons. Two of which could be family loyalty or economic stress. A student may need to take care of their younger siblings, a sick relative, or other duties within the family unit like working to support the family in their monetary needs. (Dresser, N., 1996, p. 50)

Language Barriers

A language barrier will affect a students' ability to learn new academic content. Bilingual education has been very controversial in California schools. Bilingual education is not unique to California or the United States. Canada has experienced such issues in their French Province, Quebec, where the federal government provides funds to set up bilingual education when at least ten percent of the population speaks the minority language. (Bonvillain, N., 2003, p. 307) Although it seems logical to offer bilingual education to minority language students, Canada has faced the same battles California has. For both California and Canada a dominant language emerged, forcing one official language to materialize as the mainstream.

First language and the fluency affect the learners' ability to acquire fluency in the second language. (Lightbown, P.M. & Spada, N., 2000, p. 85) Determining the students' fluency in their native language will determine their ability to learn a second language. If a student attended little or no formal schooling in their native language, thus negatively affecting their ability to learn a second language; however, if the student is fluent and literate in their native language, the student will acquire a second language at a faster rate.

The language the students speak at home will effect which language the student prefers to speak. Parents who have graduated from high school, both mother and father, tend to focus on education more in the home, then those parents without a high school diploma. (Greenfield, P.M. & Cocking, R.R., 1994, p.75)

Parents' Level of Education

At Lincoln Elementary school, a survey is performed and included in the school's API Growth Report. Last year, sixty-four percent of the parents responded to the survey. Of those who responded, fifty-eight percent did not graduate from high school (See Table 1.3, page 20). (http://api.cde.ca.gov/api2003/API/2003Grth_sch.asp?SchCode=6015440&DistCode=&AllCds=19647256015440)

Educational Programs

Excel Program

The excel program is geared towards grouping students who are high achievers together. Lincoln Elementary school groups these students together in hopes of propagating an environment conducive towards learning at a slightly higher academic level. This year, eight excel students were recommended to a gifted and talented education program. (<http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/lincoln/About/about.html>)

Title I Program

Lincoln Elementary school is considered a title I school, meaning they are eligible to receive funds for being considered a low-achievement, high-poverty, and limited English school. (<http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/lincoln/About/about.html>) Funds are allocated to assist in establishing improvement within the school and raising academic performance among pupils.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is a program used to assist students who are struggling with reading. This program involves a highly trained reading specialist tutoring students one-on-one with reading instruction. The program is short-lived and yields positive results. (<http://www.readingrecovery.org/>) Lincoln students have benefited from the one-on-one instructional assistance that this program offers; therefore, reducing the retention rate of the students this program serves.

Conceptual Holes, Problems, and Needs

There is a lack of information about the number of absences that elementary students incur, although there is plenty of data stating the absence rate of high school students. Information regarding the number of absences that elementary students incur would benefit this subject. Gathering data on the reason for absences with a correlation of the student's academic level would help to identify absence as a huge factor for student achievement.

Language barriers may not necessarily be a main cause of student failure. Without precise information stating the percentage of students who are not fluent in English and their academic performance, we

cannot clearly identify or rule out language acquisition as a factor. There is plenty of information on bilingual education and the effectiveness of bilingual education on monolingual students.

Further Research should be conducted in the following areas: transient level (including where, when, and why students moved from point A to point B), measurement of the L2 language fluency of both student and causal effect it has on testing and academics, and effect of parent literacy, academic attainment, and language. Research into methodologies used in monolingual schools serving Hispanic students will provide a cultural insight into academic instruction. Methodology across cultures will assist educators everywhere on what each culture values in the academic arena.

Implications for Practice and Inquiry

Envisage

The literature portrays a future that paints a bleak future for Hispanics in California. This affects the lives of nearly every student I contact during the course of my day. Every parent I look in the eye and greet. Every mark I place on a report card, I make with concern. As an educator, my dream is to pass on the love of learning and of life long learning to my students. If statistics show my students are not fixated on higher education, it is my job as their teacher to find ways to reach the community I teach. My interest in education is not to see who I can eliminate from the educational race, but who I can propagate and mold into one of America's finest. How can my students succeed if they are not given every possible opportunity to strive for excellence? My students spend everyday drilling on reading, writing, and math. There is no time for the humanities. There is no time for social studies, art, and music; these are the subjects that influence and nourish our society. But instead, all of their classroom time is used for rote instructional methods, drilling and killing, until every ounce of edifying gratification is gone; diminishing any chance of educational advancement. My dream, my hope for our future and for the future of my students is the same one that my relatives had in mind when they immigrated into the United States, a premise of freedom and success, the American Dream.

Equality in education is vital in providing the necessary building blocks Hispanics need to success in academics. Kozol wrote in *Savage Inequalities*, "Every child has 'an equal minimum' but not that every child has the same. Stated in a slightly different way, it guarantees that every child has a building called 'a school' but not hat what is found within one school will bear much similarity, if any, to that which is

found within another.” (Kozol, J., 1992, p. 209) I have personally seen this in two schools in the same district, and yet no one realizes how wrong and disproportional it is.

As one of the leading populations in California, providing Hispanic students with an ample education will enhance the California economy and maintain an economic homeostasis, if not economic expansion.

Making an investment in the future of Hispanic youth will prove to decrease the probability of an economic crisis within California. If measures are not taken to increase Hispanic educational attainment and employment earnings, California will find itself in a financial downward spiral. More than 50% of the California population will be Hispanic, meaning that over a quarter of the population will receive food stamps if present trends continue. An economic crisis is imminent. Change is necessary.

Chapter 3

PLANEE PARA EL ÉXITO

Research Proposal

In order to expand on my premise, further research is required. There are three research areas that would help to develop a better understanding of the hurdles a Hispanic student must cross to succeed within California schools: action research study of successful Hispanic students and low-achieving Hispanic students in California schools, researching educational models used with Hispanic students in Mexico, Cuba, and other Latin American countries, and expert outreach.

Action Research Study

The action research study is structured to seek information regarding Hispanic students in California schools and their academic achievement. Three schools are studied in each district in California, providing there is Hispanic student enrollment within that school setting. Schools are selected through economic placement: low, middle, and upper class. The number of Hispanic students, language ability, academic achievement, absence rate, and parent education are the variables in the study. One week in each school setting is sufficient. Interviews with teachers, parents, students, and office staff are crucial in obtaining a clear picture of the school culture. Video, tape recordings, and written notes are used in collecting data for use in the study. In California, there are over 1,000 districts. It would take roughly seven years to visit three schools for week-long visits in each district. (<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D04%26reportNumber%3D16>) To receive rapid results, it would be necessary to outline study standards for the most accurate report of conditions. Using seven researchers, the study duration decreases to one year, 52 weeks. The ethical concerns revolving around this study is to protect minors' identification, names, and other personal information without a signed release consent. Information gathered will uphold the purpose of the research study and topics relating to the subject. All information gathered during the study is used solely for research purposes.

Expert Outreach

The focus of expert outreach is to make contacts with professionals in the teaching field, professors at the University level, and researchers whose expertise lies in the area of study. Making contacts that are aware of the issues surrounding Hispanic and Latino students, families, and individuals will provide valuable insight into the culture, language, values, and lives of Hispanic and Latino people living in California. Meetings, committees, and conferences are valuable ways to assemble key proponents and reflect on concerns. Expert testimony is a valuable resource for use in research and improvement in Hispanic studies.

Cultural Education Experience

Learning about Hispanic and Latino culture in Mexico, Cuba, and Latin America will enhance research efforts by focusing on school achievement, methodology, and standards within the home countries of California immigrants. Learning about instructional methods, teacher preparation, culture, and influences will provide a better understanding of what needs to be implemented into California schools or techniques used with Hispanic/ Latino students.

Conclusion

Lessons Learned

Even though I was prepared for constructing a thesis, I would never be prepared for the data attained regarding Hispanic student achievement and educational attainment. The statistics are alarming and disturbing. Always suspecting that Hispanics are among the impoverished, but never suspecting that Hispanics are among this most improvised ethnic group in California. I learned where my passion lies and where I feel my effort is most needed. My desire to educate not only my students, but myself and my peers about current trends or students needs and offer thoughtful insight into possible solutions elevates my consciousness. Through my research, theories on bilingual education and methodologies were confirmed; however, these methodologies do not match those of school district guidelines or programs offered on a district level. However, with my new knowledge, I will facilitate instruction in a manner to suit my audience utilizing all possible resources. Learning more from my students about their culture and experience in Mexican schools; I will integrate my knowledge of their school

experience into my curriculum. My investigation of the Hispanic educational climate will continue for years until I am able to assist in positive academic changes to benefit Hispanic and Latino students.

The inquiry process was a challenge at times, but provided me with the much needed format to express and formulate my research results and evidence. The course provided a helpful forum to relate and respond to questions prompted to assist in a chosen topic. The questions asked were relevant and assisted in thoughtfully presenting each student with a virtual conglomerate of ideas until one well-formed premise remained. I am pleased to present my final work for your review.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1.1 **Ethnic Population in K-12**
Source: Department of Finance.

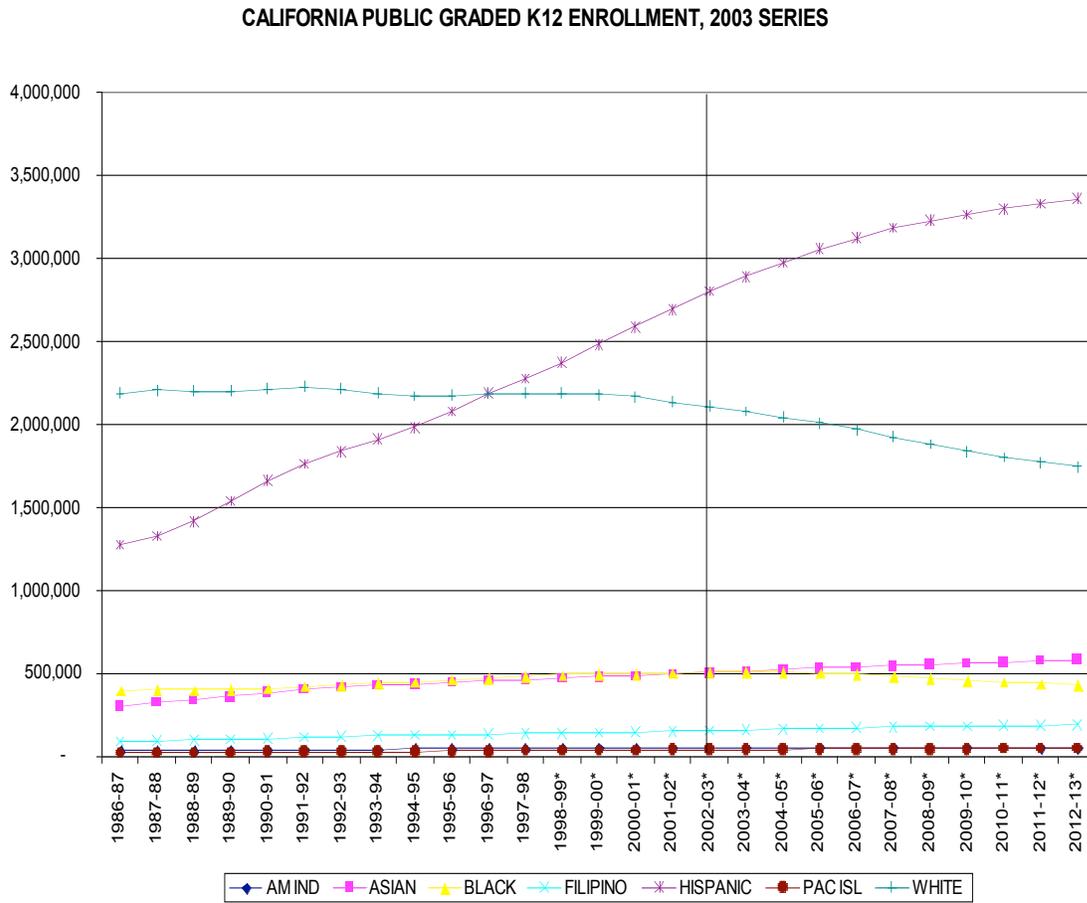


Figure 1.2 **Populations of Hispanics in U.S. (Origin)**
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

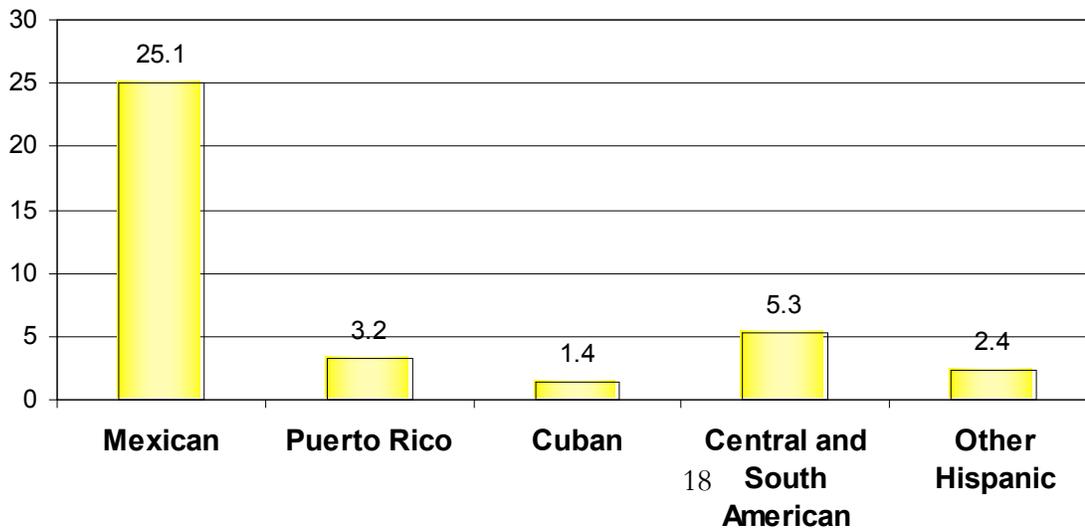


Table 1.1 **Percentage of High School Drop outs.**
 Source: Mini-Digest of Education Statistics 2002

Year	All Races	White	Black	Hispanic
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27.0
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8
1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6
1998	11.8	7.7	13.8	29.5

Table 1.2 **Ethnicity of Food Stamp Recipients**
 Source: California Department of Social Services

Ethnicity	Percentage
Hispanic	45%
White	23%
Black	19%
Other	13%

Table 1.3 **Educational Attainment of Lincoln Elementary Parents**
 Source: 2002-2003 API Growth Report, api.cdc.ca.gov

Parent Education Level (Star)	Percentage
Percent with a response	64%
Of those with a response:	
Not a High School Graduate	58%
High School Graduate	18%
Some College	17%
College Graduate	5%
Graduate School	2%