



## Supporting Latino Students

**Robert Rader**  
Executive Director, CABE

The United States continues to change. According to *Hispanic Teacher Recruitment: Increasing the Number of Hispanic Teachers*, published by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, “currently, at more than 53 million, the Hispanic population is the nation’s largest, youngest, and fastest growing minority population.”

Connecticut, too, continues to change: according to State Department of Education (SDE), between October 2010 and October 2013, the percent of Connecticut students of color rose almost 4 percent. Most of the growth has occurred in the Hispanic population. Today, Hispanic students equal over 21% of our State’s student population. There may be an even higher percentage of Hispanic students in the earlier grades (1-5).

According to SDE, the graduation cohort of Hispanic students has made the largest gains compared to White, Black, Asian, Indian or Hawaiian students over the last four years, but are still the lowest at 74%. When we look at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the “nation’s report card”) on Connecticut results, in 2015, Hispanic students had an average score that was 18 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was narrower than in 2000 (26 points) on the grade 4 math test. In

8th grade reading, Hispanic students had an average score that was 26 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 1998 (30 points).

In 2013-14, only 3.6% of our State’s teachers were Hispanic. By way of comparison, 3.5% of our teachers were Black and around 92% were White. So, although both Hispanic and Black teachers were around the same low percentage, there are almost double the number of Black teachers per Black student than Hispanic teachers per Hispanic student.

Hispanic students need Hispanic educators for the same reason that Black students need Black teachers: they serve as role models of success, often better understand the challenges faced by these students and often are better prepared to teach students from the same culture.

In addition, a 2016 Federal Education report entitled, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*, alludes to a study that, “compared with their peers, teachers of color are more likely to (1) have higher expectations of students of color (as measured by higher numbers of referrals to gifted programs); (2) confront issues of racism; (3) serve as advocates and cultural brokers; and (4) develop more trusting relationships with students, particularly those

*continued*

In Connecticut, according to SDE, the number of students in which Spanish is the non-English dominant language at home was 51,744, approximately 9% of our students. This not only gives us an idea of the size of the Hispanic population, but also the difficulties many Hispanic students face when they get to school.

Additionally, while we know that while there are Hispanic students throughout Connecticut, in 2013-14, there were approximately 210 schools whose student body was composed of 10 percent or more English Learners. The vast majority of the ELL students came from Hispanic backgrounds and to some extent they are concentrated in our city school districts, which are often our poorest districts. Not only are these children faced with the obstacle of not having English spoken in their homes, but they also come to schools with all the burdens of our poor neighborhoods: poverty, crime, violence and other hurdles.

with whom they share a cultural background.”

How do we better reach Hispanic students in addition to better recruitment and retention of Hispanic teachers?

In the June issue of the *American School Boards Journal*, in an article entitled “Cultural Awareness,” a doctoral candidate interning for NSBA’s Center for

Public Education, **Breanna Higgins**, wrote about this very issue. While these comments generally apply to both African-American and Hispanic students, they are worth considering in this article focusing on Hispanic students. Her discussion of research shows how cultural differences interact with schooling:

*“African-American and Hispanic students need to have stronger attachments to their school and teachers than their White counterparts do...Hispanic girls are often taught at home to defer to males and find it difficult to display their academic abilities and knowledge. The cultural rift between student’s [sic] home and school environments make students feel like ‘misfits’ at school. As a result, some students reject academic achievement as an act of defiance against what they view as a classroom or school of Whiteness and White values.”*

These cultural differences can “impede the academic success of minority students if teachers are unaware of their existence. But those challenges can be mitigated by strong teacher preparation in cultural awareness and the unique needs and expectations of minority students.

*“[u]sing culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms, reflecting on cultural norms and biases, and incorporating ethnic/racial traditions into class routines and content will help students of color feel they are part of the school community.”*

I also asked Hill Regional Career High School (New Haven) Principal **Dr. Madeline Negron**, for some recommendations to help Hispanic students. She is president of the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (CALAS) and she spoke with others on the CALAS Executive Board about how to help Hispanic students. They “strongly recommend adapting culturally responsive pedagogy along with setting high academic expectations. We all prefer the simple approach recommended by **Dr. Sonia Nieto**.” She is Professor Emerita, Language, Literacy, and Culture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Dr. Nieto writes about “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)”. It is:

- “A mindset that respects and honors students’

*continued*

## Connecticut Stats

Hispanic population in 2014:..... 541,153

Hispanic percentage of statewide population in 2014: .....15%

Hispanic percentage of statewide population under age 18 in 2014: .....22%

Median age of Hispanics in 2014:..... 28.3 years

Per Capita Income of Hispanics in 2014:..... \$19,644

Unemployment rate for Hispanics in 2014:.....12%

Hispanic buying power in 2013 as share of state’s buying power: .....7%

Percent of eligible Hispanic residents who voted in 2014: .....31%

Percent of Hispanic households that paid more than 30% of income for housing in 2014:.....59%

Poverty rate for Hispanic children in 2014:.....33%

Percent of Hispanics without health insurance in 2014: .....16%

Infant mortality rate for Hispanics in 2011-2013:..... 6.1 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Source: Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. More information can be found on the website: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/lprac/pages/fastfacts.html>

individuality as well as their cultures, experiences, and histories

- A way to include these in the curriculum and through teaching approaches
- A commitment to continuing to learn about one's students' individuality as well as their cultures, experiences, and histories
- A stance and a set of dispositions including:
  - o Engaging in critical self-reflection about one's values, biases, strengths, and limitations, and how these can affect one's effectiveness with students of diverse backgrounds
  - o Valuing language and culture in word and deed
  - o Insisting on high quality and excellent work from all students
  - o Affirming students' identities while also expanding their world
  - o Honoring families
  - o Exemplifying a commitment to life-long learning

Some Practical Examples:

- Learn to say students' names correctly
- Label room with languages spoken by students
- Display the work of all students

- Learn as much as you can about your students

Get to know your students' families by engaging in authentic family outreach

- Learn another language
- Learn about and become involved in the community”.

An upcoming article will discuss English Language Learners and provide ideas on how best we can support them.

*This article is one in a series of articles encouraged by the CAFE Board of Directors' Diversity Committee. It is important to all readers to be aware of the challenges and opportunities for our students, teachers, school leaders and Board members of color.*

*As stated in a disclaimer in Fulfilling America's Future: Latinas in the U.S., 2015, published by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, "the terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably [in this article], while recognizing their distinctive demographic and cultural meanings." For example, in the Western part of the country, Hispanics are mostly originally from Mexico. In Connecticut, most are originally from Puerto Rico.*

*For more information about specific school district demographics see available at <https://goo.gl/OqQTBT>.*