



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

81 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242 - (860) 571-7446 - Fax (860) 571-7452 – www.cabe.org

Supporting Latino Students

By 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 fast growing minority population.”

Connecticut, too, continues to change: according to 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.

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. So, 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.

According to SDE, the trend graduation cohort of Hispanic students has made the largest gains of white, black, Asian, Indian or Hawaiian over the last four years, but are still the lowest at 74%.

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.

A 2016 Federal Education report on *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 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](#), 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 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.”

This article is one in a series of articles encouraged by the CABE 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.”