

Reasons Behind the Lack of Academic Achievement of

Hispanic Students



By Dr. Lourdes Ferrer

“Students' perceptions are the fabric of their own reality and the frame of reference in which they operate and respond to the world in and around them.”

Dr. Lourdes Ferrer



■ Seminars/Workshops for Teachers and School Administrators

- ◆ Creating a School Culture of Achievement for All Students
- ◆ Helping ELL Students Achieve by Using Strategies that Increases the English Language Comprehensibility (Structure English Immersion)
- ◆ Underlying Reasons for the Lack of Achievement Among African American, Hispanic and Native American Students/School Strategies to Overcome these Challenges
- ◆ Getting the “Kind of” Parental Involvement Schools Need
- ◆ Building Classroom Assessments Aligned to State Standards and Assessments in Content, Rigor and Format
- ◆ Mining, Analyzing, Communicating and Using Data for School Improvement Purposes

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- ◆ Navigating the American Educational System
- ◆ Underlying Reasons for the Lack of Achievement and Home Strategies to Overcome Them

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- ◆ Navigating the American Educational System
- ◆ Underlying Reasons for the Lack of Achievement and Strategies to Overcome them
- ◆ Test-Taking Strategies to Improve Performance on Standardized Tests

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Editor's Note: Student quotes used in this book were not edited for grammatical correctness. Student names attached to the quotes are not the actual names of the students. Students pictured are not directly connected to any quote or finding.

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What kids say...

It was around 11:00 A.M. when I received a call from an experienced and highly respected superintendent of a single high school district in Illinois. The purpose of his call was to ask me to move to Illinois and assist his district in closing the huge performance gap between White and Hispanic students. Because of that conversation, I spent numerous hours learning everything I could about the State of Illinois, its academic standards, its assessment system and its students' performance on the Prairie State Assessment Exam (PSAE). I learned that Illinois, like many other States across the nation, was experiencing a heavy influx of Hispanic students, and like the rest of the nation, this large sector of their student population was lagging behind their White peers in reading, mathematics, and science at all grade levels.

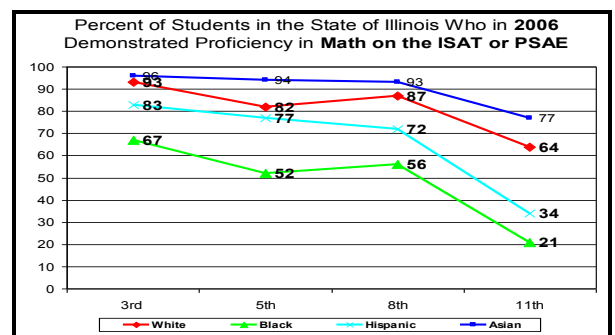
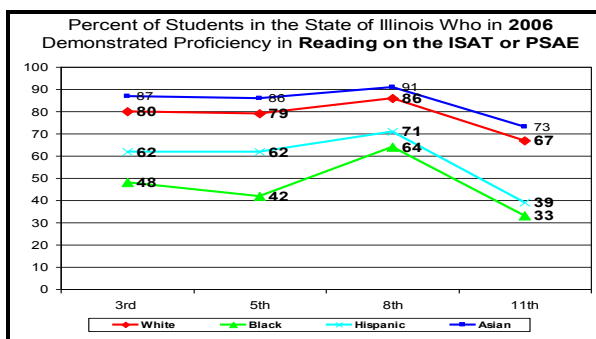
I knew that according to national research the three greatest factors associated with the underachievement of Hispanic students are the lack of qualified teachers or lack of preparation among qualified teachers, inappropriate teaching practices and at-risk school environments.

Experts in the field of school reform have predicated that even teachers, who are experts in their content area, are being challenged with teaching traditional academic content to students who are not proficient in the English language and many

times lack the necessary background knowledge and academic experience to perform at grade level. Many English Language Learner (ELL) students are currently being taught by teachers who use inappropriate teaching practices; that is, teaching to the whole class at the same time and controlling all the classroom discussion and decision-making. This type of teaching, known as the teacher-directed model, emphasizes lecture, drill and practice, remediation, and student seatwork. The situation for a linguistically diverse student population worsens when their schools' environments does not contribute to the conditions that influence academic success. At-risk school environments are characterized by the alienation of students and teachers, poor instruction, low expectations of students and teachers, disciplinary problems and high truancy.

After so much reading and data analysis, I knew that there was more to know than what research allowed me to understand. So as a clause for accepting the superintendent's invitation, I asked permission to conduct an on-site qualitative study to find out, from the students' perspectives, **the underlying reasons for their lack of achievement.**

I personally felt committed to do this study because I strongly believe that - **people's perceptions are the fabric of their own reality.** What people perceive becomes the frame of reference in



which they operate and respond to the world in and around them. If the States' accountability systems are based on the students' performance on the State tests, then it is appropriate to learn and gain insight from the students themselves about their lack of achievement. Any school reform initiative set out to improve the academic achievement of minority students that does not take in consideration other factors such as students' attitudes, beliefs, values, and frame of reference is positioned to fail. Permission was granted for the study to be conducted and I soon left my home State of Florida.

THE STUDIES

A few weeks after I arrived to Illinois and got myself acquainted with my new job I began the study. I spent numerous hours observing the kids in the halls, visiting classrooms, and engaging in conversations with students, parents and teachers. Then, through one-on-one interviews and focus groups, I asked hundreds of students the following question: ***Why are Hispanic students' scores lower than their White peers?***

It is important that I clarify that the information I have included in this document is not only based on the study I conducted at the high school district that hired me, but also on a series of similar studies that I conducted in other middle and high schools in the State of Illinois.

The students who participated in these studies were enrolled in schools with large populations of students who are either Mexican or of Mexican descent. Among participants, there were different levels of acculturation, English language proficiency, Spanish language proficiency, academic success, economical status, family educational background, and other family dynamics. In spite of their diversity a commonality emerged --***great appreciation for and entrenchment within the United States.***

THE RESULTS

Personal Motivation

All of us have a frame of reference, or life view; a paradigm of reality in which we operate. In actuality, we are only motivated to do that which is within our own reality. Let me make a comparison that may clarify what I mean. I could probably motivate people in the mountain regions of Colorado to take ski lessons much more easily than I could motivate someone in coastal Florida to do the same. Why? Skiing is within the frame of reference of many Colorado residents. The

Hispanics ...

- Are the fastest growing immigration group and the largest minority;
- Reside primarily in urban areas and live in households and communities with high and sustained poverty;
- Are mostly recruited by industries seeking low-skilled/low-wage labor;
- 67% live in poverty despite earning more money than in their native countries.

frame of reference of Floridians might include surfing, fishing or diving instead. Floridians do not see mountains, snow or people skiing on a regular basis; therefore, it is outside of their paradigm, making the skiing experience an activity that Floridians are unlikely to pursue. This is the kind of difference of paradigms that exists between the American educational system and many Hispanic students who have recently immigrated to the United States.

Teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors or any other professional responsible for the academic achievement of students have a greater capacity to motivate students who share their same frame of reference. I am fully aware of the effort that many of these professionals are putting into motivating underachieving Hispanic students to improve their performance in school, take

Hispanic Students...

- Attend schools with high poverty rates which are more likely to be poorly maintained, structurally unsound, fiscally under funded, with large number of uncertified teachers;
- Have the highest enrollment increased in public elementary schools over the past 20 years (over 150%);
- Will comprise one-fourth of the total K-12 population by 2030;
- Have the lowest enrollment rate in early childhood education;
- Are two grades behind the average white child by age 9;
- Is the most under-educated major segment of the U.S. population;
- Have the highest drop-out rate in the United States;
- Have a graduation rate of 57% and barely 10% earn a college degree ;
- Have lower test scores than their White peers in mathematics, reading, and science. — (NAEP)

homework more seriously, come to class every day or prepare for State exams, only to see a minimal response from the students. Nevertheless, it is extremely hard to have motivated students if they are not operating within the same paradigm of reality as the school system is. We cannot assume that they are lazy or do not care when

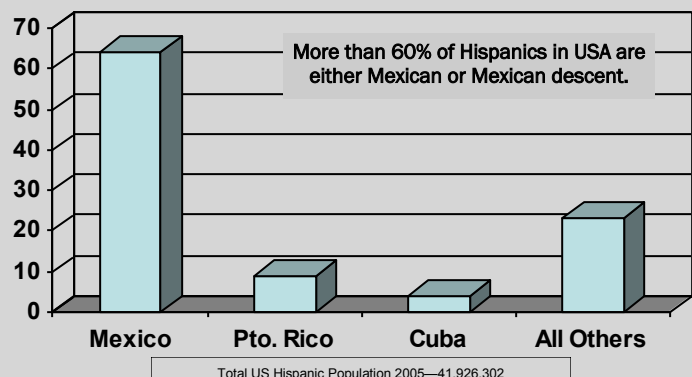
in fact with many we are asking for something that is outside of their perception of what is possible.

I have found that the difference in paradigms between the school system and many Hispanic students, especially the newly arrived, is significant. I learned that while the school system operates on a paradigm where the high school experience is a stepping-stone to post secondary education, many Hispanic students who participated in the studies felt that they have already achieved success by just being in the United States. Leaving behind a life of poverty in their homelands is such a sizeable achievement that doing well in academics paled in comparison. The students' primary focus is on staying in America, especially the ones who do not have documentation, and acquiring the necessary skills to survive. Many of these students came to the United States to work and a post secondary education is not part of their success paradigm.

Post secondary education often does not exist as a possibility for many of the newly arrived Hispanic students. Thus doing well academically, and earning good grades to qualify for college lacked meaning. It is more than an issue of not desiring or planning to go to college. In their paradigm, they have already achieved the maximum success possible for themselves by just graduating. Graduating from an American high school was perceived by the participants as a giant accomplishment that could be reached with minimum effort. The lack of motivation caused by non-aligned paradigms was also evident in the area of State testing.

Many of my participants indicated that since a passing score on the State test is not a graduation requirement, they did not have a lot of motivation to do well on them. They further stated that such tests were only relevant to college hopefuls. A few shared that another reason for not being motivated to do well on the State test was derived from some interactions with teachers. Some participants ex-

Hispanic Population in the U.S. by Country of Origin



Who are Hispanics?

Hispanics are US citizens, residents or immigrants, whose background hails either from Spain or a Spanish-speaking country of Latin America.



pressed sympathy for the teachers' frustrations and viewed the test as an unfair measure of the teachers' performance. Some indicated that even if the State test was important, they were hindered from doing well by a perceived need to have outside tutoring to do well on the test. They were unmotivated by the lack of financial resources for tutoring or special help.

Financial status was a significant factor in the lack of motivation in general for Hispanic students. They expressed a responsibility to contribute to the financial support of their families. Students were compelled to be employed personally to help with family finances. This was often at the expense of motivation to achieve academically.

Parental Factors

Family is one of the most important values in the Hispanic Culture; it operates differently than it does in many American families at large. Hispanic family members tend to have a specific role within the family unit, and members function according to that structure. These roles focus on the common good of the whole family. Families may often make a decision as a group that may be seen as good for the family unit, while it may not necessarily be best for an individual member of the group. This may result in a parent making a decision that is good for the family but has a negative impact on the academic success of their child. For parents to make good decisions regarding the academic careers of their children they must see the benefits of such success and must know how to navigate the American Educational System. Students indicated that many of their parents lack this skill. If Hispanic parents do not perceive education as a way to unlock success in the American society, or know how to access services to resolve problems, then they cannot navigate the system for the well-being of their children. This often means that Hispanic students find it difficult to fully participate in academic and extra curricular activities that would empower them to maximize their potential in their academic and post-academic careers.

The study revealed that there is sometimes a lack of parental support for Hispanic students in the home. This support comes in the area of supervision, such as homework. Students often said that their parents do not hold them accountable or provide guidance. Several stated that their parents, living abroad, had a negative impact on their schoolwork. In other instances, much of the lack of support was also due to the level of stress that Hispanic parents encounter in their lives in the U.S.

Financial limitations are a significant source of stress in the home for parents and disturb the focus of students within school. Many of the students I talked to had to think about getting personal employment to support the family. The lack of finances meant they could not get extra out-of-school help or participate in extracurricular activities. It is expected and natural for the student to take on major financial responsibilities in some families.

In my interviews, students commented that they felt that their parents have low expectations of their performance in school because of their personal academic achievement. Very often, the student will be the first in

their family to graduate from high school. Even the parents who have higher expectations of their children as students had great difficulty coaching their students in a process they have not been through themselves.

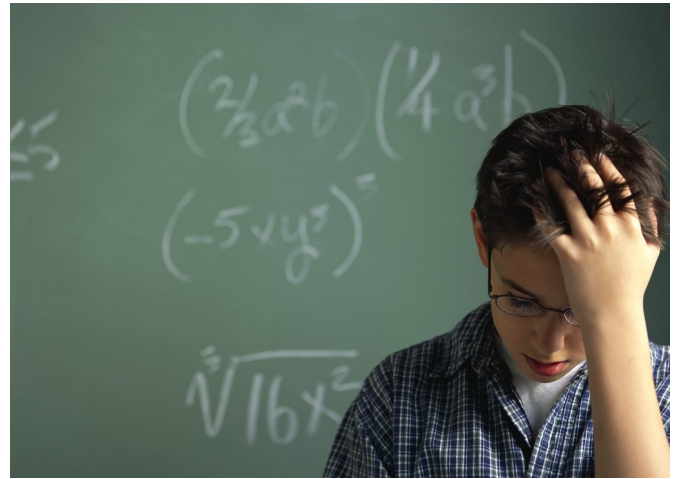
Because the view of family is such a significant factor in the Hispanic culture, any interventions to improve the academic achievement of Hispanic students must include partnerships with the parents. The parental issues that the students mentioned do not have easy solutions. I know that we cannot resolve them all at a school level; however, unless we find a way to engage parents in partnerships, none of them will be resolved.

Circumstantial Factors

As I talked with students a class of factors emerged which are endemic to their lives. They are part of the circumstances into which they were born. They are factors, which exist because of decisions their parents have made, perhaps with good reason, but the circumstances have created challenges for these students as they progress through the school system. Some of them are readily apparent. While we do not need students to tell us that the problems exist, the fact that they recognize them may help students be a little more open to the help we may want to offer. It will come as no surprise that the inability to speak English is a major consideration.

Students recognize that a lack of English proficiency is a barrier to classroom participation and a barrier to extra curricular activities. Students indicated that learning to speak English is of greater importance to them than preparation for college. For them, speaking English is the gateway to employability and economic survival in the U.S. A lack of English speaking skills is just one factor that puts them behind schedule in their academic career.

Educational discontinuity was also identified as a significant contributor to academic failure. I found some students who indicated that prior school-



Raul: *In mathematics we have lower scores because some problems are in English and we don't understand. And when the test is in Spanish and we still get bad scores, it is just because some of the students don't care that much.*

ing, often in another country, had not prepared them for their current high school curriculum.

Illegal immigration status compounds the lack of motivation and achievement. Apart from living in constant fear, it causes a profound sense of hopelessness as students envision a future where they cannot go to college, get educational financial aid, or even get a drivers license to travel there. It is understandable that children in these circumstances, often through no choice of their own would consider State tests, GPA's, and graduation as less significant than their American-born English speaking counterparts who have grown up in a system designed to prepare them for college.

Social Factors

Two categories of social factors exist which, according to students, affected their academic achievement. One category was the in-culture social behaviors that negatively affected students. The other category was out-of-culture social behaviors, which were exhibited as prejudice by non-Hispanics toward Hispanics as a cultural group, particularly newly arrived Hispanics.

The need to belong emerged as a primary in-

"In spite of the huge differences in levels of acculturation, English proficiency, Spanish proficiency, current academic success, family academic background, family support, etc., the following commonality emerged: Great entrenchment and appreciation for being in the United States and a strong determination to "ser alguien en la vida", that is, to be somebody in life."

culture social motivator for behavior patterns that were non-conducive to academic achievement. Hispanic students expressed the need to differentiate themselves from their White peers and guarantee the acceptance of their Hispanic peers. The result of this need is sometimes teen pregnancy or aberrant social behaviors, such as membership in gangs and drug usage. I realize that the need for acceptance may not be the only factor for these behaviors, but it was the one the students identified.

Another in-culture social behavior identified as a reason for a poor academic performance was what the students called "*relajo*". "*Relajo*" is disruptive classroom behavior, like fooling around in class, especially among boys. Students commented that it was more prevalent in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Bilingual classes.

The most significant cultural and social issue for Hispanic students was an out-of-culture perspective of negative attitudes of non-Hispanics toward Hispanics. They perceived negative presuppositions toward themselves as coming from White students, teachers, and even the Federal Government. I heard comments that non-Hispanics viewed all of them as illegal and a problem, whether they were or not. These social issues are important because individuals often modify their behavior based upon social expectations or pressures. The belief that they are not accepted by teachers or their White peers may lead to diminished participation in a school system that they perceive as rejecting them. The first step is

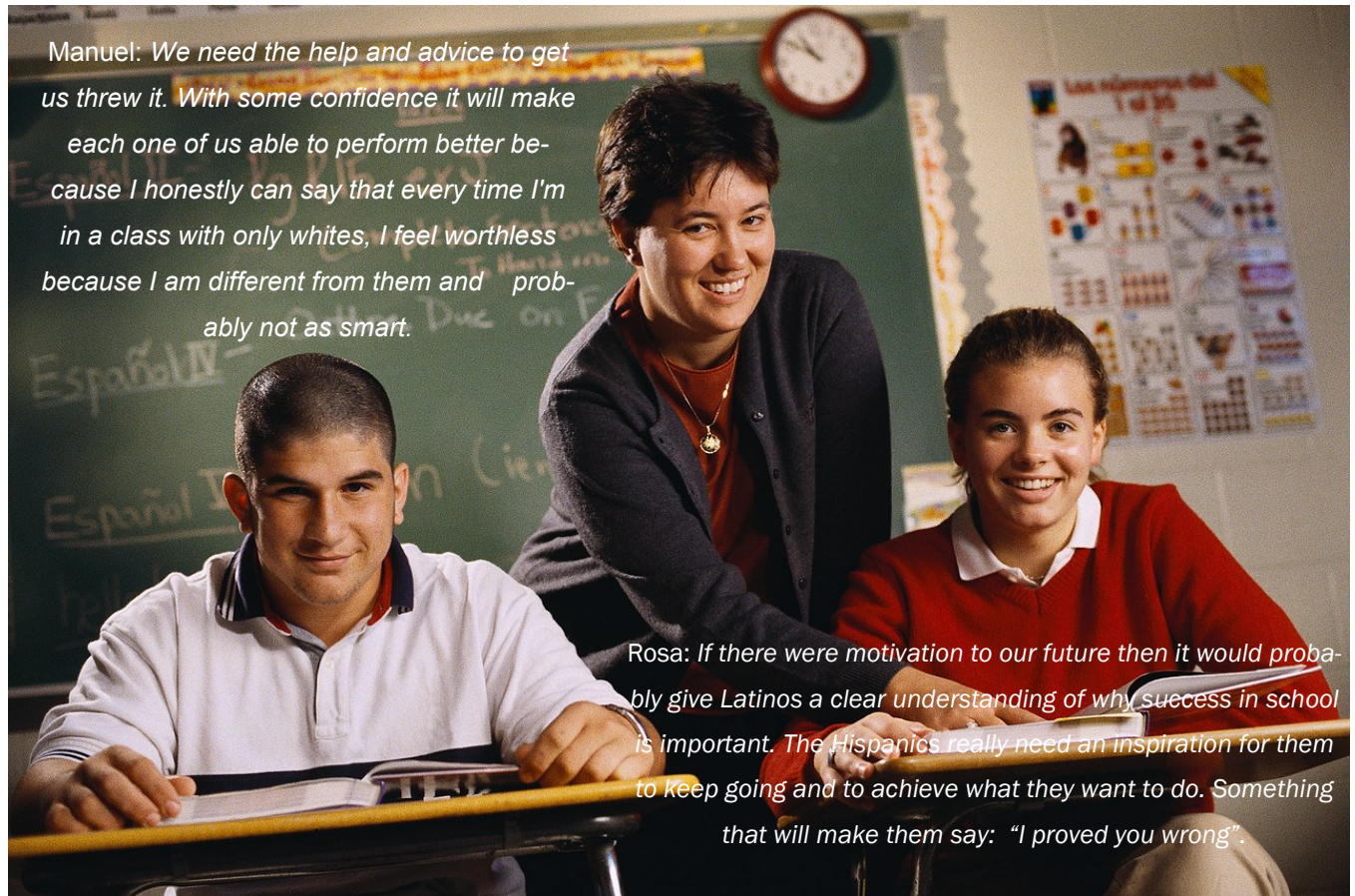
to realize that while we may not be able to do everything, if we identify and target these issues, we can make significant progress. Interventions need to begin at the district level and move out from there — so, where should we start?

RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to insure that there is a district-level gate-keeping function in place. There needs to be an entity in the district that is responsible for meeting the needs of the Hispanic population. This entity needs to determine priorities, ensure implementation of necessary interventions and initiatives and subsequently evaluate these efforts to provide feedback to the schools' officials and board of education. In some way this entity may take the form of a Welcome Center program, financially supported and implemented by the school or District.

Welcome Center programs should be designed to benefit not only students who have just arrived but also Hispanics enrolled in Regular programs. These programs need to have a clear mission and measurable objectives that have been developed and supported by the program director, ESL and Regular teachers, as well as Hispanic parents and students. Welcome Center programs should also be of assistance to teachers as they operate within the directives of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Teachers need to understand the purpose and fundamentals of the NCLB Act within the context of national cultural trends and population shifts. As they align their instruction to State standards and assessments, they need to be mindful of the underlying reasons for the general under-achievement of Hispanic students. In doing so, they can help these students overcome challenges they face in and out of school and encourage Hispanic students to focus on their academic and social responsibilities. Teachers are key



stakeholders in the development of interventions. Since meeting the challenges of the NCLB Act requires that students demonstrate proficiency on the State tests in reading and mathematics, I recommend that teachers become experts in assessment and learn how to use these instruments for instructional purposes.

Motivating Hispanic Students

If we want to help Hispanic students overcome the challenges they face, we need to help them be mindful of their personal, academic and social responsibilities and motivate them to do something about their lack of academic achievement. There are several things that school systems could do to facilitate that.

Schools with high Hispanic enrollments could create an academic program such as a "Latin American Studies Academy". A program like this will give students the opportunity to enroll in courses, participate in events, and travel to locations that will allow them to become fully proficient in both English and Spanish; learn about the cultures of various Latin American countries including learning about their history, arts, politics, and economies; and, understand the Hispanic experience in the United States. I believe this would help them respond to Hispanic trends and issues in the context of contemporary perspectives. A program like this would help equip all students, not only Hispanics, enroll in colleges that have Latin American Studies programs as a major.

I recommend the development of a formalized plan for the recruitment and retention of a minority staff. Schools need to create an environment in which minority teachers are empowered to make meaningful contributions and experience career success. They would not only provide role models for minority student, but also inspire, motivate, and mentor minority students to excel academically and to plan career paths for themselves. This would also increase the exposure of all students to diverse cultures and perspectives on living, learning, and leading. Schools could also weave a range of cultural perspectives throughout their course curriculums and



Consuela: *Most of them (Whites) have parents that are educated and that do push them to do the best that they can, and they have the money to do it. Most of our Hispanic, parents come from Mexico and they came here to escape from poverty. They don't know English and don't know this country. For example, in my family my dad only studied until fifth or fourth grade and my mom dropped out on her first year of high school. They are now here working in this country for low wages. My dad tells us that if we want to study and do our homework to do it and if we don't, then to not do it. But my mom is more supportive; she is the one making sure we go to school and have everything we need.*

employ a cross-cultural pedagogy to motivate, engage and improve the academic achievement of minority students.

Finally, I recommend that schools employ development interventions for students to help them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the school system and plan their academic careers.

Helping Hispanic Parents

It is imperative that we empower Hispanic families to overcome the challenges they face in their pursuit of a better life in the United States. This may

be accomplished through citywide forums for Hispanic families in which they have the opportunity to present salient issues in regards to their children's well being. These forums would provide feedback and allow the school to obtain suggestions for improvement.

Forum or seminar formats could be used to develop the ability of Hispanic families to navigate the American school system. This would improve academic career planning for their children and increase personal participation in adult ESL and job training offerings. They could also be used to help them understand underlying reasons for the lack of achievement among their children. It would also provide parents with proven-to-work home practices that would empower them to monitor their children's academic careers.

Remediating Circumstantial Factors

This is the area in which the school is most often called upon to assume responsibility. The academic nature of most circumstantial factors places students within the realm of the school system to measure and then create interventions to remediate certain factors like language and cultural barriers. Indeed, that is the purpose of programs like ESL and Bilingual Education. There are several interventions that a school system may employ.

I recommend strategies such as forming partnerships between high schools and the elementary and middle schools that feed them. The schools should also affiliate itself with civic, business, and community leadership from the communities that are feeding the school. These partnerships and affiliations would promote collaboration and commitment among their respective leadership to be involved in the implementation of initiatives to increase graduation rates of minority students and help close the academic achievement gaps between White and non-White students. Most of all, these partnerships would encourage cooperation in initiatives to empower families by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to ensure the academic success of their children.

Schools systems should implement, assess, and improve plans to accelerate English proficiency. The goal is that all students enrolled in ESL and Bilingual programs are able to speak, read, and write English at a level that would ensure success in college or the workforce. Success would be measured by an increase in the percent of student who demonstrate proficiency in both reading and mathematics on the State's accountability tests.

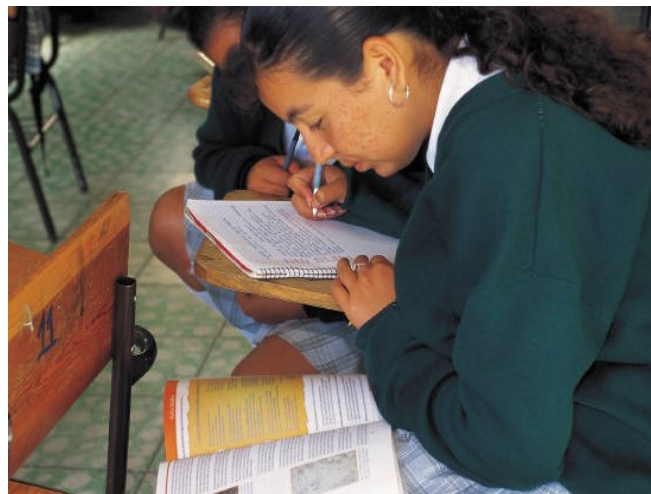
I advise schools to identify incoming 9th grade students who are below grade level in reading or in mathematics and enroll them in some kind of curricular program designed to remediate these gaps and get them to proficiency as soon as possible. Offering reading and mathematics remedial courses during the summer would also help students catch up to their grade level. I highly advice that high schools offer a one semester each PSAE preparation course in reading and mathematics for juniors who have low scores on the 10th grade standardized assessment test.

School stakeholders can respond to the conditions of undocumented students by creating awareness among political leaders of the correlation between undocumented status and student achievement. We need to bring to light the unfairness of holding schools accountable for students who have no reason to improve their performance in school and do well on the State test because of their illegal status.

Counteracting Negative Social Factors

There are several activities or programs that can be put into place to counteract negative social factors and eliminate beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are non-conductive to academic success.

One intervention would be to retrofit the school's physical appearance to promote understanding and appreciation for the cultural diversity. Utilize it to recognize the accomplishments of diverse ethnic racial groups represented in the school. Design the ambience to build the self-esteem and self-confidence of students and create an atmosphere in which all stu-



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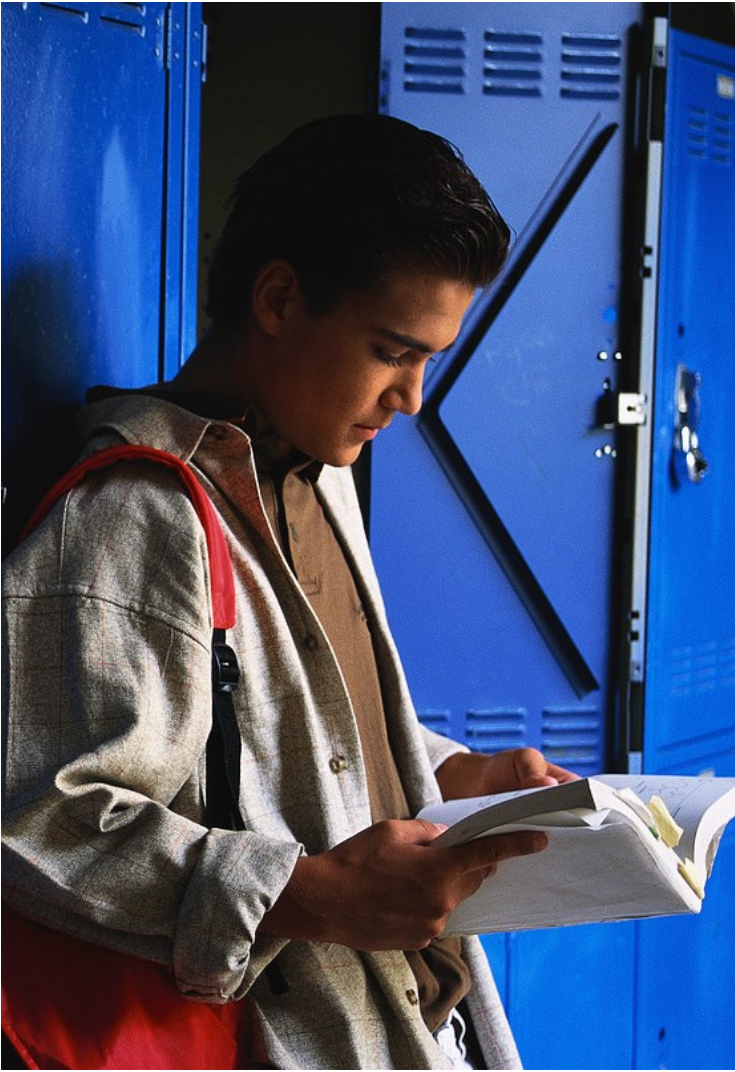
Juanita: It seems like no one cares enough to take the time to listen. Most of us see it as it began with us being beneath the White man and that most of us aren't going to amount to anything. Most don't see the point because we think that a high school diploma will be enough. A lot of the time it just seems like no one cares. Teachers are either a complete inspiration. They make it seem like anything is possible or they make you feel like you aren't capable of anything. It's also really hard to get help at home when both of your parents are working full time jobs to make a better life for you, especially when you have younger siblings at home.

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dents are welcomed.

I also recommend the implementation of culturally sensitive teen-pregnancy prevention programs based on an appropriate curriculum for both boys and girls at the middle school level. These programs should be evaluated based on their impact on teen pregnancy reduction, increased academic achievement and graduation rates. Schools could also hold student workshops related to teen-pregnancy designed specifically for Hispanic students.

It is obvious that we need to intervene to curb illegal drug activity and gang membership. We



Roberto — *Help our parents understand that we will need help and motivation because that shows us that our performance will make a difference for someone other than ourselves.*

need to plan and implement an anti-drug program to include an internal investigation that identifies the extent of the problem of illegal drug sales and use and gang activity. Schools also need to create a mechanism, such as a hotline, in which students and parents can report drug and gang activity. Once again, schools could hold student workshops related to drug use and gang participation specifically designed for Hispanic students.

Schools must deal with the feelings that Hispanic students have of being looked down upon as an ethnic group.

Opportunities must be developed to help educators engage students in interaction and dialogue activities that will help bridge the gap of understanding between different ethnic groups. These initiatives need to encompass interactions with both teachers and peers of different ethnicity, to bring about a mutual understanding.

CONCLUSION

The most important and difficult assignment is aligning students' frame of reference with that of their teachers. It will assert strategies not commonly used in today's school reform initiatives. Changing students' frame of reference or life paradigm will require changing their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about themselves and the world around them. This endeavor will require:

1. *Transformational experiences*
2. *Intentional persuasive communication,*
3. *Mentor-mentee relationships*
4. *Exposure to role models.*

Students with a non-conducive to academic success frame of reference will need not only the desire but also the drive to overcome academic and non-academic challenges to reach the level of proficiency that will allow them to be successful in school. If that happens, everybody wins.

What kids say...

Maria: *I think that White people do better in school than Hispanics mainly because White people have more money and aren't as discriminated against or stereotyped as much as Hispanics and African-Americans. The reason Asians do better in school than their Hispanic counter-parts is because usually Asian cultures have very strict and rigid rules and parents, meaning that Asian parents will be stricter and have much higher expectations of their children in school than the average parent. The reason that Latinos do worse in school is because usually both parents have to work a lot in order to support their children. This leaves the kids unsupervised, and they go out and get into trouble. Sometimes even the older children and the parents in the family are working to support each other.*

Carmen : *Don't be racist. There are occasions when a Latino student will wear some colors together and it will be considered gang colors, but when a preppy white girl does it they ignore it. In general Latino students do worse in school and have more problems in and out of school. They should see a counselor (preferably Latino) who won't judge them right away just based on their actions, because you can feel when someone has judged you and when they are being condescending.*

Tito: *Graduating high school will help me economically. I don't want to be part of the statistics that says that Latinos are not graduating anymore, that they don't care about school. I want to be one of the positive ones. I want to be included in the statistics of the ones that graduated high school. I want to help my race and I want to help my community. I want to be part of something, you know. I can have a better life. In Mexico there are not many opportunities. My mom came here to give us an opportunity and if we don't take it is like giving up all the sacrifice she did. It is like letting her down. I want to have a good life.*

Antonio: *Our High School already does a lot for Hispanic students, like having English as a second language class and other regular classes that are taught with English as a secondary language. But these students are almost sheltered. If these Hispanic students were given the chance to interact with other cultures within the school, the rate of achievement might be higher. If these Hispanics see what there is for their taking, they are going to want to succeed. Working at a fast food place, will not be the dream, but becoming a doctor or an engineer will be.*

Rigoberto: *In my opinion we Hispanics do not try as hard in our education because we are more sensitive when it comes to family values. Most of the time students do not get as much attention as they need from their parents because the parents are working most of the time to maintain the family, plus the students may also lack a motivation that will push them further and use their full potential in their education. The reason why I am here is to help my family by sending them the money that I make with my job. I am also attending school so that I can get a good job in the future and be able to bring my family here to the United States.*

Jorge: *I think that there are many factors that make us be below other races. It includes family, background, and the society. The family has a lot of influence. Yes it is true that you need to pull yourself out and have that motivation, but if when you were a child no one was there to show you that you could do it on your own, and that sometimes it was necessary, then how can you know this when you are older. I think that you still need to be motivated to some*

level. And the family needs to play that role. How can someone expect something from a person when that person doesn't know how? Also our background, my parents don't see the need to use the techniques like long division, they can do it on their head, but when it comes to our generations, the ways of school have change, and they are still living in the old ways. Many of my friends have dropped out of school because they have to be the support in the family. The society has separated the races; we are not one group of people as we should be.

Yolanda: I think that it is important to let the students know that it is important to succeed. Some ways to do this is that the students that have low math grades can meet after school in a club with a bilingual teacher that can help them do their math. I know this works. And get the parents involved in this; we had a program like this in my middle school. Make sure the school has done everything possible to help. If after everything the students still don't improve, because they just don't care, that is on them. But the school knows it did everything it could. Also, during the meetings and school activities, I suggest a bilingual speaker so the parents can feel more welcomed, during the honors breakfast for example. If we work together I know we can improve, working together as Hispanics.

Pablo: They (Hispanics) don't know how to help their children because they don't have that knowledge, either because they dropped out of school to help their family or just simply because they couldn't afford to go to school. Their kids have a harder time because well they can't go home and get help from their parents since they probably know more than their parents. Most of their parents don't even know English which could be hard if you have an English project or something. They need to focus in school and realize that if they don't do what they have to do they're going to struggle in life as adults and Whites or others will keep on discriminating against us and keep putting us down. But we can change that and prove them wrong because we all have the same education at school so nothing really makes us different from them.

Lucia: Stereotypes tend to keep Hispanics from living to their fullest potential. Many Latinos are used to being looked down upon. So living with the words of oppression and the reminder of stereotypes keeps me from falling. I am Latina. I want to make something of myself. I want to prove everyone else wrong.

Dr. Lourdes Ferrer



Growing up in a disadvantaged family in Puerto Rico, Lourdes soon learned that education was the way out of the poverty cycle. This understanding led her to complete her undergraduate degree in mathematics and begin teaching. She left Puerto Rico in 1979 to do community development work in Guatemala. She established and directed schools, an orphanage, feeding centers, and clinics. She procured resources for these entities through interaction with non-profit organizations and by obtaining assistance from Guatemalan government officials. Her community education work consisted of educational radio programs and parent education in various venues. Her experience in community development was the catalyst that led

Lourdes to choose Research, Evaluation, and Measurement as the focus of her Master's degree.

When she moved to the United States in 1990, she had to overcome enormous financial, linguistic, and cultural barriers to pursue the American Dream. She became a Bilingual Curriculum Content (BCC) mathematic teacher in Dade County. She went on to complete her Doctorate in Leadership and took a position as a School Improvement and Assessment Specialist for the School District of Palm Beach County. Her responsibilities included leading NCLB staff development opportunities for teachers and school administrators, as well as speaking at community forums regarding the same issues.

Today Lourdes works as a consultant assisting schools, Districts and Regions developing and implementing strategies to improve the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELL), Hispanic, and African American students. In order to have a better understanding of this lack of achievement she has interviewed hundreds of ELL, Hispanic, African-American and Native Americans middle and high school students to find out, from their perspective, what are the underlying reasons for their lack of achievement and what can the school do to help them improve. These findings are used to customize strategic plans at the school level to help the target population.

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