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Hispanics boost enrollment in Western public schools

By Steve Giegerich
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

With Hispanics graduating from high school in numbers that will keep increasing for years, the head of a higher education group that released a new report on the trend says colleges need to step up efforts to accommodate the nation's largest minority.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education projects that Hispanics will account for 21 percent of the country's public high school graduates in 2008, up from 17 percent in 2002.

The commission found that nearly 5 million Hispanics were enrolled in the country's public elementary and high schools in 1993-94. And by the 2007-08 school year, it projects that Latino public school enrollment will be about 9 million.

"In general, colleges are still not prepared," said David Longanecker, executive director of the interstate commission. Its report, "Knocking at the College Door," is released every five years and is used by local school districts, states and higher education to track enrollment trends.

"We know there is a relationship between race and income and academic preparedness," Longanecker said. "But we don't have the support services in place to enhance the success that we need."

Using data compiled from the nation's leading test-makers, the U.S. census and other sources, the WICHE study projects a significant regional shift in the school-age population to the South and West that follows general population trends.

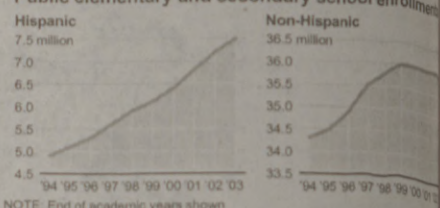
In 2007-08, Southern states are expected to enroll 16.7 million students in kindergarten through high school. WICHE said enrollment in Western schools will be 11.9 million in 2007-08, followed by 10.8 million in the Midwest and 9.3 million in the Northeast.

Because of continuing gains in Hispanic enrollment, the report said, white students will represent a minority of graduates from Western high schools in 2013-14.

Although Hispanics enroll in college at almost

Hispanic school enrollment rises

Hispanic enrollment continues its steady increase in public schools across the country while the number of non-Hispanics has declined over the past few years.



the same rate as non-Latino students, they bring special circumstances to school, Richard Fry, a senior research associate with the Pew Hispanic Trust.

Hispanics are less likely to attend college full time and are more likely to work so they can provide financial support to dependents, Fry said. "In order to help these students succeed, colleges — particularly bachelor's degrees — also associate's degrees and vocational training — you have to help them negotiate their work lives, their family lives, as well as their academic lives," Fry said.

He said community colleges, in particular, need to improve their services for Hispanic students placed in remedial academic or vocational training programs.

T. Jaime Chahin, a scholar at the Tomas Rivera Center at Texas University in San Antonio, said some schools, especially in the Southwest, are making progress integrating Hispanic culture into campus life.

But he said schools across the country need to do a better job of recruiting and retaining Latino faculty members who can serve as role models for Hispanic undergraduates.


The process of pushing Hispanics toward college degrees need begin at the elementary school level, he said.

Hispanics should feel "that college is a novelty but is something that is expected, even first-generation students who have never been exposed to these kinds of opportunities," Chahin, also a professor at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos.

"In order to help these students receive degrees you have to help them negotiate their work lives, their family lives, as well as their academic lives."

— Richard Fry, senior research associate with the Pew Hispanic Trust


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