

THE HISPANIC EDUCATION COALITION

December 26, 2002

The Honorable John Boehner
Chair
The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon
Chair, 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition, an ad hoc coalition of national organizations dedicated to improving education for Hispanics, we are pleased to submit recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This reauthorization will be pivotal for the Hispanic community. Hispanic children are the largest and fastest growing group of minority students in the higher education pipeline. Yet, traditional college-aged Hispanic youth attend and complete college at lower rates than Whites or African Americans. Over half of all Hispanics in higher education attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions, which are chronically overburdened and under-resourced. This reauthorization presents the Congress with a golden opportunity to turn the tide and ensure that the fastest growing population in the Nation will also be fully prepared to contribute to its welfare and prosperity. We urge you to adopt policies that will expand access to postsecondary education for all.

There is a danger that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will be reduced to a series of false choices that will set the Hispanic community back in terms of access to postsecondary education. Outreach, mentoring, and preparation are critical components of access to college for the Hispanic community, given the high dropout rate during the K-12 years in our community and the fact that Hispanic children who do complete their elementary and secondary education attend schools in the poorest neighborhoods, with the fewest resources and most inexperienced teachers. However,

outreach, mentoring and preparation without a guarantee of sufficient student financial aid will be counterproductive and will not only retard access to and persistence in college, but could also serve as a disincentive for completing high school as hope fades for future education.

Additionally, outreach and support services must be infused throughout our K-12 system through partnerships with states and institutions of higher education as well as be targeted to low-income, first-generation students who have already demonstrated promise. Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO programs must be strengthened during this reauthorization. Since its creation in 1998, GEAR UP has grown to serve an estimated 1.4 million students – over one-third of whom are Hispanic. Combining GEAR UP with TRIO would be a severe blow to outreach and preparation initiatives in the Hispanic community.

There is one group of young people for whom the doors of opportunity continue to be locked. Each year, high schools across the country graduate a significant number of talented immigrant students who have grown up in the United States, attended the same elementary and secondary schools as their U.S.-born peers, and excelled at the same academic requirements as their classmates. These hardworking students dream of pursuing higher education. However, unlike their native-born peers, they lack access to state and federal financial assistance and lower in-state tuition rates, making it virtually impossible for them to afford a college education. In effect, they are denied the opportunity to share in the American Dream. Last Congress, Reps. Chris Cannon (R-UT), Howard Berman (D-CA), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), introduced the “Student Adjustment Act” to correct this injustice. Passage of this legislation can no longer wait. To ensure that we, as a Nation, do not risk losing more students – students who are among our best and brightest – we ask that the Education and Workforce Committee take a leadership role in ensuring that this legislation is passed as soon as possible.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our views on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Attached are a series of charts with specific recommendations in key areas for the HEC, including:

- Rededicating Title IV to expand access to postsecondary education, including strengthening the GEAR UP and TRIO programs, increasing grant aid for the most disadvantaged students, and promoting the attainment of baccalaureate degrees by improving transfer rates from 2-year to 4-year colleges;
- Expanding and improving the High School Equivalency Program and College Assistance Migrant Program so that the children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers can share in the American Dream;
- Improving access to teacher education so that more Hispanic and other underrepresented groups enter the teaching profession and addressing the critical shortage of teachers and faculty with expertise in teaching limited English proficient students; and
- Strengthening Hispanic-Serving Institutions through simplifying the undergraduate program and establishing a much-needed graduate education program.

Please do not hesitate to contact Moira Lenehan-Razzuri at (202) 862-8514 if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely.

Moira Lenehan-Razzuri
HEC Co-Chair
National HEP-CAMP Association

James Ferg-Cadima
HEC Co-Chair
Mexican American Legal Defense
and Educational Fund

On behalf of:

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Council of La Raza