

# THE HISPANIC EDUCATION COALITION

May 23, 2003

The Honorable Judd Gregg, Chair  
The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), 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.

Because Hispanic children attend schools in the poorest neighborhoods, with the fewest resources and most inexperienced teachers, enhancing student academic preparation for postsecondary education is critical. 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. In addition, given that K-12 teachers will increasingly have a more linguistically diverse classroom, the Higher Education Act must strengthen our nation's teacher training programs by ensuring that our next cadre of teachers are sufficiently prepared to respond to the linguistic needs of the 4.4 million English language learners in our Nation's public schools.

Outreach is also an important component 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 those that do graduate from high school continue to face a number of barriers to

postsecondary education, including less access to information about the college admissions and financial aid process. For example, early admissions policies, which improve applicants' chances of admission by as much as 50 percent but discourage students from comparing financial aid packages, tend to be less advantageous for Latinos who are less informed or familiar with early admissions policies and for whom cost and financial support is a critical factor in choosing a college.

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act also presents an opportunity to address the low college retention rates among first-generation and other Latino students. College affordability, together with access to academic and other support services, are important factors that affect college matriculation for Latino students. Yet, little accountability for ensuring sufficient student financial aid and other support exists. Institutions of postsecondary education must be held accountable for ensuring that first-generation, Latino, and other students that face such seemingly insurmountable barriers to attend college actually persist through college and graduate.

Finally, 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, Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Richard Durbin (D-IL), introduced the "Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors 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 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions 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.
  - Increasing Latino college enrollment and retention by discouraging admissions practices that are barriers to enrollment, as well as enhancing academic and supportive services aimed at improving the college completion rates for Latino students.

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

Sincerely,

Maryln McAdam  
HEC Co-Chair  
National HEP-CAMP Association

Melissa Lazarin  
HEC Co-Chair  
National Council of La Raza

On behalf of:  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Migrant Legal Action Program  
National Association for Bilingual Education  
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association  
National Puerto Rican Coalition