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The Education Gap Among Latina/o Students

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Abstract

The focus of this research paper is on the education gap of Latino/a students, between the ages of 18 and 24 compare to White students. According to the U.S Department of Education, about 82% of Latino/as graduated with a diploma or received a GED from high school, compared to the 92% of the White demographic. While the high school graduation rates among Latinos has improved significantly over the last fifteen years, there still need to be further efforts to close the achievement gap. Preliminary research suggests that poverty rates among Latino/a families affects the quality education they receive and whether or not a successful transition into a college or university occurs. This study relies on scholarly sources as the method of analysis to draw the conclusion regarding the relationship between poverty rates and educational achievement of Latino students.

Keywords: Education, Poverty, Latina/o, Latinx, Achievement gap, High School

The Education Gap Among Latina/o Students

Introduction

Education is a huge staple in the today's society. It can ultimately decide whether one gets a good paying job or not, or whether they get a job period. For the Latinx community, there seems to be an education gap compared to other races, but mostly their White counterparts. With more than 82 % of Latinx students either receiving a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED), it seems like progress has been made, but once compared with their counterparts, 82% is actually relatively low. With 95 % of Whites, 93 % of Blacks, and 97 % of Asians either receiving a diploma or GED, it makes the Latinx students the lowest number of any ethnic race to receive a diploma or GED (U.S Census Bureau, 2015). In addition, preliminary research suggests that poverty may correlate with this education gap. According to a graph from the Pew Research Center, a little under half of the Latinx population living close to the poverty line, and nearly one fourth living just under the poverty line, therefore, it can be difficult to secure a good education for the present generation and for the future Latinx generations. It is definitely a topic that needs more focus so this gap continues to narrow and find solutions that may help this population.

The Issue at Hand

In recent times, we have seen an education gap when it comes to Latina/o students compared to their white counterparts, or even other races as well. A study from the Pew

Research Center shows that the Latinx population has the lowest graduation rate of any ethnic population, falling at around 18 percent not completing a high school diploma or GED (Pew Research Center, 2015). While this number has improved massively since 2000, where the completion rate was around 52.4 percent (NEA,2002). This number as impressive as it stands, is low compared to their White counterparts, where there was only a five percent non-completion rate, but that wasn't even the lowest. That number goes to the Asian student population, where only 3 percent did not complete a high school diploma or GED (Pew Research Center, 2015).

San Diego State University wrote about this very issue, but the difference is they focused in on undocumented and immigrant students. (The statistics are shown from various years taken from many government websites and journal articles ranging from the years, 2009-2016). According to the article posted from the university, there are 3.2 million undocumented children and young adults under the age of 24 (www.migrationpolicy.org, 2012), which is the target age of students receiving a high school diploma or GED. According to the U.S. Department of education, in a study conducted in 2015, forty percent of the 3.2 million undocumented have less than a high school education, compared their U.S. born counterparts, where only eight percent do not have at least a high school education. This is showing that a little more than half of the undocumented students are receiving a high school diploma. In that same study from San Diego State University, it shows that 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools every year, and then about five to ten percent of those students pursue a higher education, but far fewer graduate with a degree (US Department of Education, 2015). This is showing that there is some sort of education gap in the system, and it is showing bias against the Latinx population, especially the undocumented immigrants.

This seems to be an issue much longer than what we see today. There are examples in the past of Latinx students not graduating till they are 21 years of age, due to a rigged school system that wanted them to fail. An example of this kind of schooling would be shown in the documentary “Stolen Education”, which told the story of the discrimination that went on in the Driscoll School District that happened in 1955. Latinx students were forced into having to take three different versions of first grade: beginner, low, and high. Then a case regarding this issue was brought upon the federal court of Texas, that would change how education is presented in the South and the rest of the United States. In the court case Hernandez et al v. Driscoll Consolidated Independent School District, eight hispanic students were asked to testify in an effort to have equal schooling for all students. The court recognized the efforts and made sure this issue would not happen again. Unfortunately, this type of discrimination happened to any ethnic minority member and is still not completely resolved.

How Poverty Effects This Gap

In some cases, it has been known that if a student and their family is known to be under the poverty line, that they are more likely to dropout out of high school. A study from the US Health and Human Services shows that to be under the poverty line, a family must earn less than \$24,000. For the case of about half of the Latinx demographic, they fall around or below this poverty line (Amadeo, 2018). Although the number does fluctuate in states such as Alaska and Hawaii, as cost of living is significantly higher (poverty line in Alaska: <\$31,000 and Hawaii: <\$28,000) (Amadeo, 2018). This amount given can be stressful. In this case some students will feel they need to work multiple jobs, along with their parents, while still attending

school. This can cause an insurmountable amount of stress for a student, both physically and mentally, which can cause the student to drop out or perform poorly in school. This is an issue that needs more light to be shed on it, as this seems to be a growing epidemic.

This is also a problem with undocumented families, as they have to pay close to 11.6 billion in state and federal taxes, which is a higher surmount than the top 1% (San Diego State University, www.cbsnews.com, 2016). In 2010, undocumented immigrants paid about 13 billion dollars into social security, but only received one billion of those dollars back in benefits (San Diego State University, www.ssa.gov, 2014). With this struggle of money at hand for undocumented immigrants and Latinx families alike, it is a struggle to stay in school to further their education. Although given the opportunity to access additional education, such as a four-year university, and get into better jobs that pay well, they would have more money to spend in the U.S Economy (San Diego State University, College Board, 2009).

How This Issue Can be Fixed

This issue can be fixed however. With the help of the schools and resources from the state and national government, the dropout rate can get even lower than it already is. With the help of certified guidance counselors in high schools, this can improve the number of Latinx students that decide to dropout come to a halt. It is understandable that not every school in the United States has the money or resources to provide these guidance counselors to students, but it is an initiative that needs to be made. With 65% of the jobs in 2020 that will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school (San Diego State University, cew.georgetown.edu, 2014), the time is now to put a halt to dropouts, or we will not see the day

where young Latinx minds thrive in a well-paying career, or a career in general. A high school diploma does not have the same value as it did twenty years in the past. If one is in order to succeed in today's hectic job market, then one must earn a degree from higher education. Whether it be a two-year, four-year, or trade school, it is important for the Latinx students to graduate from high school, so they can pursue better jobs. Better jobs would equal better opportunities for future generations of Latinx students to go to better schools and not have to worry financially.

Improvements Have Been Made

However, despite the graduation rates in high school, improvements have been made in not at the high school, but also attendance and completion rates in college as well. In 2015, we saw more than 82% of Latinx students graduate from high school or receive a GED (Pew Research Center, 2015). This is a huge improvement from 2000, where only 52.4% graduated or received a GED (National Education Association, 2002). When it comes to further education, we see as of 2017, that 35.6% of Latinx students received at least a Bachelor's Degree from a four-year university that they originally attended. To add to that number, another 10.2% graduated with at least Bachelor's from another institution (Tate , 2017). Although, compared to their white counterparts, who graduated an institution at a combined total of 62% (Tate,2017), this is still a very impressive number that continues to grow.

Conclusion

Education is very important in today's society, and is the gateway to a better job, better pay, better benefits, and a better future for generations to come, so we should give all students, whether the race or gender, the opportunity to succeed. There does need to be more resources available to students that suffer in school due to poverty at home, those two issues need to be seperated. In order for these dropout rates to slow down and eventually stop, certified guidance counselors need to be set in place in high schools across the United States, and hopefully these could be a government issued purchase. The future is coming quick, with more than half the jobs today requiring secondary education, this education gap needs to halt, no matter what ethnicity one might be.

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