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The State of Hispanic Education: Correlations between educational attainment, nativity and language in Illinois

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the levels of educational attainment for Hispanics in Illinois and to gain an understanding of why possible trends occur. The research question is: What is the correlation between English proficiency, nativity and educational attainment for Hispanics, as compared with the overall population in Cook and McLean counties? In order to determine the correlation between these variables, data from the 2000 US Census were analyzed for the two population groups. Pertinent data included selected social characteristics, such as levels of educational attainment, nativity and language spoken at home. Though some statistical variation exists based on location, the overall findings indicate that levels of educational attainment are lower for the Hispanic population. Furthermore, as the percentages of the foreign born population and those who spoke English “less than ‘very well’” increase, the levels of educational attainment decrease in all three geographic areas. These findings indicate a need to explore bilingual education programs within Illinois, particularly those that focus on English Language Learners.

Research Questions

- What factors contribute to low levels of educational attainment among the Hispanic population?
- Is there a connection between English proficiency, nativity and educational attainment?
- How do these social characteristics compare for the Hispanic and total populations?
- Are there similar results between different geographic levels and locations, such as between the state and county level?
- How do the results for the state of Illinois compare with the results for Cook and McLean counties?

Methodology

To investigate these questions, information from the 2000 US Census was examined. Using various census tables and data, information was collected on social characteristics for the total and Hispanic populations in three areas: the state of Illinois, as well as Cook and McLean counties. Primary data used contained statistics on education, language spoken at home and place of birth.

Table 2: Nativity and educational attainment of Illinois households by language and language isolation. From 2000 Census, US Census Bureau.

* “A linguistically isolated household is one in which no member 14 years old and over (1) speaks only English or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English ‘very well.’ In other words, all members 14 years and over have at least some difficulty with English.” (US Census Bureau)

	All Households	Non-English Households	
		Total	Linguistically isolated households*
Total # of Households	4,076,844	617,844	180,298
Nativity of Householder (%)			
Native	87.6	36.0	14.3
Foreign born	12.4	64.0	85.7
Educational Attainment of Householder (%)			
Less than high school grad	17.8	32.4	47.3
High school grad or higher	82.2	67.6	52.7
Bachelor's degree or higher	27.2	26.9	17.0

	Illinois		Cook County		McLean County	
	Total Population	Hispanic Population	Total Population	Hispanic Population	Total Population	Hispanic Population
Population 25 yrs and over	7,973,671	754,648	3,454,738	537,738	87,220	1,597
Educational Attainment (%)						
Less than high school grad	18.6	51.5	22.3	52.3	9.3	25.6
High school grad or higher	81.4	48.5	77.7	47.7	90.7	74.4
Bachelor's degree or higher	26.1	9.1	28.0	8.8	36.2	23.9
Total Population	12,419,293	1,529,141	5,376,741	1,071,241	150,433	3,597
Nativity (%)						
Native	87.7	53.9	80.2	53.5	96.7	70.6
Foreign born	12.3	46.1	19.8	46.5	3.3	29.4
Population 5 yrs and over	11,547,505	1,354,257	4,991,310	952,430	140,745	3,027
Language Spoken at Home (%)						
English only	80.8	16.5	69.2	13.5	94.0	39.4
Spanish	10.9	83.1	17.6	86.0	2.5	59.4
Speak English less than “very well” (all languages)	9.1	46.5	15.3	47.8	2.1	28.5
Speak English less than “very well” (Spanish speakers)	5.8	46.3	9.4	47.6	1.0	27.7

Table 1: Selected social characteristics for Illinois, Cook County and McLean County for the total and Hispanic populations. From 2000 Census, American FactFinder.

Results

- While McLean County demonstrated the highest overall educational attainment, rates of educational attainment for Hispanics were lower than those of the total population for all three geographic areas. (See Table 1)
- Hispanics in all three areas had higher rates of foreign birth as well as lower English proficiency.
- Householders in non-English households were more likely to be foreign born (64.0% vs. 12.4%) and less likely to have attained a high school or post-secondary degree than the overall population. (See Table 2)
- Linguistically isolated households had even higher rates of foreign birth (85.7% vs. 64.0%) and lower educational attainment than total non-English households.

Conclusions

These results indicate a connection between high rates of foreign birth, low English proficiency and low rates of educational attainment among the Hispanic populations in all three geographic areas. Similar results on the state and county levels further indicate that this is a wide-spread phenomenon that exists locally as well as on a higher level. Furthermore, the results point to a need for improved bilingual education programs, particularly those that target foreign-born students from non-English-speaking households.