

## PRESS ROOM

PRESS RELEASES

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### Low Hispanic College Graduation Rates Threaten

### U.S. Attainment Goals | Bill & Melinda Gates

### Foundation

Hispanic students generally graduate at lower rates than their white peers, even among schools with similar admissions standards

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WASHINGTON -- A new study of national college graduation data by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) reveals that far too many four-year colleges and universities graduate less than half of their Hispanic students. The report comes at a time when the Hispanic population in the [United States](#) is rapidly growing, and their academic achievements have important implications for America's future.

In *Rising to the Challenge: Raising Hispanic Graduation Rates as a National Priority*, authors Andrew P. Kelly, Mark Schneider, and Kevin Carey found that colleges and universities that do a better job graduating their Hispanic students typically have high completion rates across the board. The results suggest that institutional commitment to college completion drives higher graduation rates for all students, including minorities.

Across the country, 51 percent of Hispanic students who start college complete a bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 59 percent of white students. That disparity holds true no matter the ability of the students or the reputation of the schools: Hispanic students graduate at lower rates than their white peers across similarly ranked colleges, from the nation's least selective to its most selective colleges and universities. Even many federally designated "Hispanic-Serving" institutions are graduating less than half of their Hispanic students.

Researchers used data from the U.S. Department of Education to examine graduation rates. The schools are grouped by how selective they are in admitting students—noted in six categories ranging from "noncompetitive" to "most competitive," as defined by the popular Barron's Profiles of

American Colleges.

When the study's researchers examined graduation rates among similarly selective colleges and universities, they found considerable variation in Hispanic graduation rates, indicating that though student background is important, institutional practices also play a role.

"These data show quite clearly that colleges and universities cannot place all of the blame on students for failing to graduate," said Andrew P. Kelly of the American Enterprise Institute. "Colleges struggling to graduate their Hispanic students should learn from the successes of leaders like Whittier College, which has successfully closed the gap between its Hispanic and white students."

The authors found that graduation rates improve with an increased institutional focus on graduating all students, better consumer information, and reformed government funding that focuses on performance instead of enrollment. In particular, they argue that:

- Institution-wide commitment to ensuring that all their students graduate is crucial to improving the rate at which Hispanic students complete a bachelor's degree.
- Disseminating information about schools that have a successful track record with Hispanic students could lead to a better match between Hispanic students and colleges and universities. In turn, this would increase graduation rates.
- Government aid to colleges and universities should be tied more closely to how well schools serve their students, not simply how many students they enroll.

Though many colleges and universities have a lackluster record of graduating their Hispanic students, the report also uncovers many schools that seem to be beating the odds.

"Schools that say 'we just don't have the resources' aren't trying hard enough," said Sharon D. Herzberger, president of Whittier College, which regularly graduates more than 60 percent of its Hispanic students, outperforming most of its peers. "If we can achieve the outcomes we do with our modest endowment, so can many others."

In light of the rapid expansion of the country's Hispanic population, the report questions whether the United States can ever achieve the president's goal of reclaiming its status as the world's best-educated country, given the overall low college completion rates of the nation's growing Hispanic population.

This is particularly important because minority youths are the "vanguard of America's new racial and ethnic diversity," according to a report released this month by the University of New Hampshire's Carsey Institute. Between 2000 and 2008 the number of minority children grew by 4.8 million, and Hispanics accounted for more than 80 percent of the increase.

Education beyond high school is critical for both a strong economy and the financial security of American families. Employees with higher education are more productive and earn more money than those who only graduated from high school.

“Educating all students well and getting them across the finish line is the biggest challenge facing higher education today,” said Hilary Pennington, the director of Education, [Postsecondary Success](#) and Special Initiatives at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “These are the students who are going to replace the baby boomers, and who we will rely on to drive our economy over the next several decades.”

Rising to the Challenge was underwritten by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This second AEI report on college graduation rates was preceded by [Diplomas and Dropouts](#) (June 2009), which documents the dramatic variation in graduation rates across more than 1,300 American colleges and universities.

Both studies use data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ IPEDS data set, which contains information from all U.S. higher education institutions. It is important to note that the data is not comprehensive and has limitations. For example, IPEDS tracks only students who attend school on a full-time basis, and the graduation rate data only includes students who enrolled as first-time freshmen. The data do not account for students who transfer to other schools or those who leave college but later reenroll.

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### [The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research](#)

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