



Access to Postsecondary Education Tenor of the Times: Education Reform and its Impact on Latino Students



by
Ronald Blackburn-Moreno
President, ASPIRA Association



BACKGROUND

There has been no fundamental change in education (curriculum, teaching, organization, financing) in the United States in more than a century



Key Characteristics of Education in the U.S.

- ❖ **Local Control** – decentralization of the education system. Education is considered a local matter. Most school boards are elected rather than appointed.
- ❖ **Finances** – Public schools funded through local property taxes (creates inequities)
- ❖ **State role** – To assure the constitutional right in most states to a free public education, coordination (not control) and support of districts
- ❖ **Federal Role (1964)** – To promote equity (help districts with fewer resources) – about 5% of school funding



BACKGROUND

- ❖ 1958 - Sputnik, the Soviet menace and the push for mathematics and science
- ❖ “A Nation at Risk” - U.S. realizes the potential of losing its economic supremacy
- ❖ Call for higher education standards in the 1980's



Characteristics of the education reform movement

- ❖ Focus on higher standards, trend towards uniform “national” standards;
- ❖ A new pedagogy;
- ❖ New assessments;
- ❖ More accountability of teachers/schools/districts and even states for student performance;
- ❖ More parental involvement;
- ❖ Restructuring of school financing/governance – private vs. public schools; and
- ❖ Increased involvement by the state



Education Standards

- ❖ Content standards - what a student should know and be able to do (at different levels and in the various subjects (e.g., science, mathematics, history))
- ❖ There are also “performance” standards, and “Opportunity to Learn” standards.



Education Standards

- ❖ National Standards – developed during the 1980's and early '90s by professional organizations - National Academy of Science/AAAS, NCTM, etc.- to guide states and school districts.
- ❖ State Standards – also called “benchmarks”, they are based mostly on national standards and serve as a guide for districts within a state. Some states mandate alignment of local standards with state standards



Teaching

- ❖ Pedagogy (teaching) – dramatic change in teaching: focus on:
 - learning should be “inductive” rather than “deductive” (discovery)
 - “Problem solving” and “critical thinking” skills vs. rote memorization
 - Less is more
 - Learning should be a group activity (teams)



New Assessments

- ❖ Standardized testing (“high stakes testing, used for accountability)
- ❖ Other assessment (“authentic assessment”), including innovative performance assessments, portfolios, etc. to enhance learning

Accountability

- ❖ More accountability of teachers/schools/districts for student performance. Typically based on student performance on state/district standardized tests.



Parental Involvement

- ❖ Parents are an integral part of a student's learning (parents need to be more involved in the education of their children)
- ❖ Parents have a greater obligation to participate in schools and to support reform



School Financing/Governance

- ❖ Debate over the fairness of school financing through local property taxes (e.g., state Supreme Court decisions declaring current financing system unconstitutional – TX, NJ, others)
- ❖ Debate about the role of the Federal Government in school financing
- ❖ Debate about the adequacy of public vs. private education (School choice movement, including public school choice, charter schools, vouchers)



Increased State Involvement

- ❖ Setting state standards aligned with national standards
- ❖ Statewide accountability systems (e.g., TOSS in Texas, Standards of Learning in VA, Regents in NY)
- ❖ Increased funding for poorer schools (mainly court-mandated)
- ❖ Statewide governance requirements



Impact on Latino Students

- ❖ Opportunity to learn – Less resources to reach higher academic standards
 - Teachers (training, experience in inner-city schools)
 - Facilities/support resources (libraries, technology, academic enrichment)
- ❖ Language and cultural differences, especially in testing in state tests (including ELL students, e.g., Regents in NY)
- ❖ Lack of parental participation/involvement (cultural/economic reasons)