Abstract:

This paper will provide an overview of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) by highlighting the history, function, and structural components of the initiative. The WHIEEH is the only federal initiative in the country aimed exclusively at addressing Latino educational opportunity.
Latino Participation Context in the United States

Latinos constitute the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (Fry, 2010). Based on the United States Census Bureau data, the Latino population group between 2000 and 2010 accounted for more than half of the nation's population growth during this time period (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). Current estimates suggest, there are over 52 million Latinos living in the United States, which makes up 15% of the total United States population (Fry, 2010). Latinos are not a homogenous group and it is critical to highlight that there are varying characteristics within the Latino community.

According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, the Latino community living in the United States is largely composed of individuals from Mexican descent who make up 65% of the total Latino population based on the American Community Survey data (Motel & Pattern, 2012). The second largest proportion of Latinos are individuals who identify as Puerto Rican who make up 9% of the total Latino population (Motel & Pattern, 2012).

Additionally, 23% of this population is under the age of 10. In light of these numbers, Latinos are the youngest group of population living in the United States (The Road to a College Diploma Report, 2003). Another important characteristic to note is that Latinos are no longer concentrated in particular traditional regions of the United States. Historically, Latinos have large populations living in the states of California, Texas, New York, and Florida (Fry, 2010). However, there has been a recent and rapid growth of Latino communities moving to North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Nevada, South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Minnesota, & Nebraska (Fry, 2010). This geographic diaspora will be critical to ensure that the needs of Latinos are being met.
Latino Educational Context in the United States

Latinos also constitute the largest minority group in the American public educational system. (Ensuring America’s Future, 2010) There are currently more than 11 million Latinos attending public elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Ensuring America’s Future, 2010). This number accounts for 22% of all students in primary and secondary education.

Latino students also make up a considerable proportion of postsecondary enrollment. Estimates suggest that 12% of all undergraduates in post-secondary education are Latino (Ensuring America’s Future, 2010). While this number, may be increasing, the number of Latinos who hold a bachelor’s degree is not. Estimates suggest that 13% of Latinos aged 25 or older hold at least a bachelor’s degree compared with 28% of the total U.S. population (Motel & Pattern, 2012). When examining this data more closely, within each nationality group the degree completions vary. For example, Salvadorans (7%), Guatemalans (8%) and Mexicans (9%) have the lowest rates of college completion with fewer than one-in-ten adults ages 25 and older in these Latino groups holding a bachelor’s degree (Motel & Pattern, 2012).

The success of Latino students should matter to everyone. The “Latino education crisis” as some scholars have called it (See Gándara & Contreras 2009) suggests that the achievement and success of Latino students should be a national priority.

White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) is an agency within the Department of Education whose purpose is to strengthen the country’s capacity to educate Latino students and increase opportunities for Latinos to participate in
federal education programs. This is the only federal initiative dedicated exclusively to the advancement of educational opportunity for Latino students. This paper will begin by providing a brief history of the initiative’s development followed by the functions and structural components of the initiative.

**Brief History**

On September 24, 1990, the WHIEEH was created as Executive Order 12729 by President George H.W. Bush to provide “advice and guidance to the secretary of education on education issues related to Hispanics* and address academic excellence and opportunities for the Hispanic community” (WHIEEH, 2012). Since the initial executive order, there have been three other instantiations of the initiative each with varying goals and objectives.

**History of WHIEEH Executive Orders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Order</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Order 12729</td>
<td>September 1990</td>
<td>George H.W. Bush</td>
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<td>Executive Order 12900</td>
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<td>Executive Order 13230</td>
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<td>Barack Obama</td>
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**What is an Executive Order?**

An executive order is a "presidential directive that requires or authorize some action within the executive branch. Presidents have used executive orders to establish policy, reorganize executive branch agencies, alter administrative and regulatory

* The term is Hispanic is a federally designated term based on self-described family ancestry or place of birth in response to a question on the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. The term will only be used when citing federal documents that adopt this term. A recent survey suggests there is great variance among how this group self identifies. The report is titled *When labels don’t fit: Hispanics and their views of identity* (2012)
processes, affect how legislation is interpreted and implemented, and take whatever action is permitted within the boundaries of their constitutional or statutory authority” (Mayer, p. 445, 1999). Executive orders do not require congressional approval and carry the same legal weight as laws passed by congress. There are multiple perspectives on their importance and impact of executive orders. Some legal scholars suggest that executive orders are an important instrument of presidential power who can utilize their constitutional and statutory power available to them (Shane & Bruff, 1996). Others suggest that executive orders are generally used to direct federal agencies and officials in their execution of congressionally established laws or policies and offer limited or temporary policy initiatives (Schramm, 1981).

While their influence may be contested, many important policy changes have occurred through the executive order process. For example, President Truman used his executive authority to issue Executive Order 10730 to desegregate schools while Presidents Kennedy and Johnson used the executive order process to bar racial discrimination in federal housing. (See Executive Order No. 10730, 1957, Executive Order No. 10925, 1961, and Executive Order No. 11246, 1965). In 2001, shortly after September 11th, President Bush signed Executive Order No. 13228, which established what we now know as the Office of Homeland Security and the Homeland Security Council that dramatically changed the coordination and implementation of our country’s national strategy to secure the border. (See Executive Order No. 13228, 2001).

While the importance of executive orders may be downplayed, the presidential power to issue a directive cannot be taken lightly. The WHIEEH was established through the executive order process as a means to shed national awareness of Latinos and their
educational success. This next section will outline the structural components of the initiative and the objectives and mission of each executive order.

**Structural Components of WHIEEH**

The WHIEEH is a supported and funded agency within the Department of Education, and is comprised of an executive director named by the President or Secretary of Education and a support staff. The initiative’s mission ends with the administration that created it but the agency continues into a new administration with the expectation that a new executive order will be issued in which a new staff can be reassigned by the Secretary of Education.

During this initial executive order, an executive staff was comprised that included an executive director and a staff that was financially supported and housed within the Department of Education. The inaugural executive director was Gilbert D. Roman who only served a short term with the initiative and John Florez shortly thereafter led the initiative. The current executive director is Jose Antonio Rico who was named to this post in December of 2011.

A component of Executive Order 12729 was the establishment of the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (CEEHA). The President appoints the members of the CEEHA and commissioners represent educational, business, professional, civic, sports, and entertainment backgrounds. The size of the CEEHA varies by administration and is usually led by two co-chairs. The commission membership varies by presidential term but one of the CEEHA’s charge is to produce reports on the educational conditions of Latinos. Appendix A outlines each of the reports produced within each executive order.
**Executive Orders**

This next section will highlight the varying goals and objectives of each initiative. While the ultimate aim is to address the academic excellence and opportunities for Latino students, the priorities and concerns raised within each executive vary and under each presidency, new and different concerns are raised about Latino educational opportunity.

*Executive Order 12729*

President George Bush signed the first WHIEEH as Executive Order 12729 on September 24, 1990. The initial conception of the initiative was to provide advice and guidance to the secretary of education on education issues related to Latinos and address the academic excellence and opportunities for this community. The inaugural initiative established the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, which is an advisory board, which as previously mentioned is appointed by the President and is responsible for advising the Secretary of Education. The size of the commission changes within each administration and its members are chosen from a diverse set of backgrounds. As cited by the WHIEEH’s website, the initial commission was responsible for advising the Secretary of Education on the progress of Latinos on the following set of criteria:

- Enhancing parental involvement
- Promoting early childhood education
- Removing barriers to success in education and work with an emphasis on limited proficiency in English
- Help students achieve their full potential at all education levels
Increase private sector and community involvement in improving education

(Executive Order 12729, 1990)

The commission issued its first report in October of 1992 titled *A Progress Report to the Secretary of Education from the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans* outlining the status of Latino educational opportunity. This report was the first official document released by the initiative and it sets forth the educational condition of Latinos from early childhood through graduate and professional education during this time. Key findings from the initial report include:

- A snapshot of the status of Hispanics in relation to national education goals
- The Commission’s ongoing efforts to assemble and examine relevant information and expert opinion
- An analysis of the challenge faced by the nation in providing Hispanics with a quality education
- A statement of the Commission’s vision for the major education-related themes it is addressing, including greater parental involvement and educational partnerships
- The Commission’s proposed next steps for carrying out its responsibilities in support of educational excellence for Hispanic Americans and for increasing accountability in both governmental and the educational community to ensure that appropriate progress is made

*Executive Order 12900*

President William J. Clinton re-established the WHIEEH and the goals of this new initiative were modified. This new commission was charged to provide the President an
“annual federal plan to promote Hispanic American educational excellence (Executive Order 12900, 1994). This plan was created to help Latinos attain educational improvements and targets as set forth by the National Education Goals. The new charge was to report on the progress of Latinos based on national standards of educational achievement.

President Clinton appointed new commissioners and the commission issued several reports, that included *Creating the will: Hispanics achieving educational excellence* and *What works for Latino youth*. Both reports outlined the educational conditions of Latinos, and identified “best practices” that could improve their educational outcomes. As cited from the *Creating the will* report (2000), Commissioners used the following five tenets in designing a plan to raise Latino educational achievement:

1. All sectors – public and private – have a vested interest and responsibility to improve the education of Hispanic youth.
2. Recognizing the educational assets as well as the educational needs of Hispanic students is essential to ensuring that these children achieve educational success.
3. There must be a sense of urgency to resolve the educational achievement gap for Hispanics. Small increment improvements will not be enough. Hispanics’ population growth and educational achievement gap require quantum leaps rather than small improvements.
4. The nation must adopt a coordinated an intentional agenda for action to raise the educational achievement of Hispanics to the highest level.
5. The actions that will secure educational achievement by Hispanic students will strengthen the educational achievement of all students.
These tenets guided the Commissioners’ efforts to highlight the conditions of Latinos within all sectors of the education pipeline. The challenge they identified was to “raise the educational performance of all Hispanic students to the same level of achievement as other students in America by the year 2010” (Creating the will, p. 52, 2000) and concluded with offering 10 things the next presidential administration must do to improve the educational conditions for Latino students.

Executive Order 13230

President George W. Bush continued the WHIEEH and the commission’s mandate was modified once again to include the following goals:

- Map the progress of Hispanics in closing the academic achievement gap and attaining the goals established by No Child Left Behind
- Develop, monitor, and coordinate federal efforts to promote high-quality education for Hispanics
- Develop ways to increase parental, state, local, private sector, and community involvement in improving education

(Executive Order 13230, 2001)

This Commission issued two reports: The road to a college diploma: The complex reality of raising educational achievement for Hispanics in the United States and From risk to opportunity: Fulfilling the educational needs of Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century. In the first report, the Commission adopted a strategic planning process that began with assessing the educational landscape of Latinos and reviewed data on the impact of cultural,
nativity, ethnicity, acculturation and socioeconomic factors on the academic achievement of Latino students (Road to a College Diploma, 2002). The Commission used President’s Bush No Child Left Behind Act as a framework of their work, and determined that four elements, accountability for results, state and local flexibility, focusing resources on proven educational methods and expanding choices for parents, would be the criteria used by the Commission to evaluate and assess best practices that should be used in working with Latino students.

The Commission’s final report, From risk to opportunity: Fulfilling the educational needs of Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century, Commissioners offered the following six recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Set new and high expectations across America for Hispanic American children by helping parents navigate the educational system, creating partnerships that can provide expanded options for children, and implementing a nationwide public awareness and motivation campaign aimed at increasing educational attainment and achieving the goal of a college education.

- **Recommendation 2:** The Commission strongly supports full implementation and full enforcement of the No Child Left Behind Act. The Commission challenges the states and school districts to, within five years, increase the percentage of fourth graders reading at or above proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress by 30 percentage points and meet or exceed the annual measurable objectives defined in each respective state’s accountability plan.

- **Recommendation 3:** Reinforce a high-quality teaching profession by more fully preparing all teachers to address the diverse needs of their students, including
Hispanics, those with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency by attracting more Hispanics to the teaching profession, and by providing incentives and compensation for successful performance as evidenced by improved student achievement. Launch a national study of the curricula, practica, student teaching experiences and the models used to integrate these preparation formats employed by colleges of education to prepare educators for reading instruction of diverse children.

- **Recommendation 4:** Initiate a new coherent and comprehensive research agenda on the educational development of Hispanic Americans across the educational spectrum from preschool through postsecondary.

- **Recommendation 5:** Ensure full access for Hispanic American students to enter college and demand greater accountability in higher education for Hispanic graduation rates. Challenge the nation’s postsecondary institutions to graduate 10 percent more Hispanic American students from colleges and universities each year, than are currently graduating, over the next decade. Urge institutions to explore the increased development of retention programs that would benefit Hispanic American students.

- **Recommendation 6:** Increase the accountability and coordination of programs within the federal government to better serve Hispanic American children and their families.

*Executive Order 13555*

The current WHIIIEH under Obama’s presidency recognizes the growth of Latinos in the United States and the executive order and describes the rapid growth of Latinos and the
urgency to address their educational opportunity. Some of the goals the current instantiation outlines include:

- Expand educational opportunities, improve education outcomes, and deliver a complete and competitive education for all Hispanics.
- Increase general understanding of the causes of the educational challenges faced by Hispanic students.
- Implementing successful and innovative education reform strategies and practices in American public schools to ensure that Hispanic students, like their peers, receive a rigorous and well-rounded education, and have access to student support services that will prepare them for college, a career, and civic participation.

(Executive Order 13555, 2010)

The current WHIEEH administration and commission has held a series of action summit meetings in more than 90 communities across the country to talk about the local conditions of Latinos. Additionally, the WHIEEH convened a National education Summit and Call to Action in October of 2010 to provide a forum to discuss the improvement and academic achievement of Latinos. In April of 2011, the WHIEEH issued Winning the Future: Improving education for the Latino community that provided an overview of President’s Obama’s vision for education and his goals for the Latino community.

**Concluding Remarks**

As Latinos continue to make up a larger proportion of the country’s populace, their educational success becomes more significant. The WHIEEH sets a national stage from which to engage what challenges impede Latino educational success and how we can begin
or continue to address their educational concerns. The findings and recommendations set forth by the WHIEEH must not be taken lightly as they provide us with a direction to be able to provide a national agenda to achieve Latino educational equity.

While the constrained and competing demands for improving education for all students have been challenged, the WHIEEH plays an active role in highlighting the ways in which Latino educational success must remain a national priority. Efforts to raise and maintain the importance of Latino educational equity must extend beyond the WHIEEH, and be a shared value amongst local and national entities. Neglecting the educational success of Latino students would surely be detrimental to the Latino community as well as to the economic and educational prosperity of the country.
References

Executive Order No. 10730, (1957).


Executive Order No. 11246, (1965).


Executive Order No. 13555, (2010).


Appendices

*Appendix A: White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Reports*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Reports</th>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Order 12729 A progress report to the Secretary of Education from</td>
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<td>the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic</td>
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<td>Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Order 12900 Our nation on the fault line: Hispanic American</td>
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<td>Creating the will: Hispanics achieving educational excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Order 13230 The road to the college diploma</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Order 13555 Winning the future: Improving education for the</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>Latino community</td>
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*Each of these reports is publically available from http://www2.ed.gov/about/\init/\list/hispanic-initiative/index.html*