

Testimony of Congressman Joaquin Castro
Committee on Education and Workforce Members' Day Hearing

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to share some of my constituents' priorities with the committee today.

Despite gains in educational attainment since the original Higher Education Act was passed in 1965, Hispanic adults are less likely to hold a college degree compared to their peers.

Because Hispanic students constitute a significant and growing portion of the U.S. student population, it is imperative that we address the gaps in educational success and college degree attainment.

There are more low-income students and students of color enrolling in college than ever before because a college degree remains the most certain path to upward mobility.

However, these students face many obstacles to completing their education, including high school coursework that fails to prepare them for college, and additional barriers to enrollment, financial aid and other processes.

These students may also face unique challenges with reliable transportation and childcare, unstable housing, and limited on-campus support.

To address these issues, Congress must take greater steps to ensure that historically underserved students have the resources they need to succeed.

This means investments in K-12 education programs that fund America's public schools -- investments in teacher training, support, and compensation, investments in retention and completion, and investments in research and development at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).

I urge this committee to take up two bills I have introduced this Congress to address these issues.

The Hispanic Educational Resources and Empowerment, or HERE Act, I introduced with Senator Alex Padilla, would authorize grants to fund partnerships between HSIs and school districts that serve a large percentage of low-income and Latino students – fostering a college-going culture and preparing students for college success.

Together with Senator Cory Booker, I also introduced the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, which would increase the enrollment and performance of underrepresented students in advanced courses, including eighth grade algebra, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment programs, and more.

When I got to Stanford in the fall of 1992, I met students who had earned dozens of college credits through advanced courses before they even got to campus – accelerating their path to graduation and preparing them for the rigors of a tough school.

At my Title I public high school in San Antonio, there were only three AP courses available, and very few students had the same opportunities as my future classmates at Stanford.

Across the country, the story is the same for millions of students.

The 2020-21 Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection showed that:

- 39 percent of more than 31,000 public middle schools did not offer Algebra 1.
- Of the more than 26,000 public high schools across the country, only 75 percent offered chemistry, 67 percent offered advanced mathematics, 61 percent offered physics, 49 percent offered computer science, and 48 percent offered calculus.

Disparities in access to advanced courses for underrepresented students, including Black and Latino students, is particularly concerning. For example:

- Approximately 35 percent of schools with high enrollments of Black and Latino students offered calculus, compared to 54 percent of schools with low enrollments of Black and Latino students.
- Latino students represented 27 percent of total high school student enrollment, but account for 20 percent of students enrolled in AP science and AP computer science courses and 19 percent of students enrolled in AP mathematics courses.

Talent is distributed across every American community. But equal opportunity is not.

Investing in greater access to advanced coursework will unlock brilliance in every zip code and help our students – and our country – succeed in a 21st century global economy.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today.