

**White House Initiative
on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans**
Fulfilling Federal reporting requirements of Executive Order 13230

c) What specific steps did your Department take to ensure these programs, projects, and initiatives were institutionalized and made part of its ongoing efforts to increase the participation of Hispanic Americans, Hispanic-serving school districts, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other educational institutions for Hispanic Americans in Federal education programs and services?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Youth Initiative, which is a new program to increase educational and employment opportunities for young Hispanic Americans, is being implemented in various VA facilities nationwide to increase the participation of Hispanic Americans in educational institutions. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) National Internship Program has been implemented nationwide as an ongoing effort to increase the participation of Hispanic students in the VA internship program. Additionally, VA is utilizing the Student Educational Employment Program to provide high school and college students with valuable work experience, training, and education by collaborating and pursuing agreements with Hispanic-serving institutions.

The Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) provides educational assistance payments to eligible Hispanic veterans and dependents that attend Hispanic-serving institutions and other colleges and universities. The educational benefit payments help defray the cost of tuition and fees, as long as the students are enrolled in approved educational institutions or training programs. VBA also makes payments to educational institutions through formula-driven awards, referred to as reporting fees. These fees are paid to cover administrative costs for processing reports and certifying veterans' and dependents' enrollments.

II. The measurable impact resulting from these efforts and levels of participation.

a) To what extent have (or will) the programs, projects, or initiatives undertaken by your Department help students to close the educational achievement gap for Hispanic Americans and ensure attainment of the goals established by the President's No Child Left Behind Act?

Dr. Jacob Lozada, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, established VA's Youth Initiative as a campaign to increase educational opportunities and employment of Hispanic youth in the Department. The

objective of this initiative is to introduce Hispanic students to role models and mentors who will inspire them to remain in school and pursue a postsecondary education. The VA Youth Initiative supports the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, addresses the problems of Hispanic underrepresentation, supports succession planning, and markets government service to Hispanic youth. It also supports the four basic principles of the President's No Child Left Behind Act: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

b) To what extent have (or will) the programs, projects, or initiatives undertaken by your Department help Hispanic parents, educators, and communities successfully prepare children to graduate from high school and attend postsecondary institutions?

The objective of VA's Youth Initiative is to involve parents, educators, and communities in successfully preparing children to graduate from high school and attend postsecondary institutions. The students and the parents are informed about the many opportunities available to attend postsecondary schools (e.g., grants, scholarships, fellowships). As an example, VA's partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will afford students and their parents an opportunity to learn about health programs that they may be entitled to, but are unaware of the benefits or eligibility requirements. One of these programs is the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

c) Highlight models of success that helped improve achievement among Hispanic students through coordinated efforts among parents, community leaders, business leaders, educators, and public officials.

The VA Youth Initiative is a model of success that involves parents, community leaders, educators, and public officials. Students participating in the program are assigned mentors who provide them one-on-one interaction to encourage them to gain insight into issues of education, career opportunities, and employment. Additionally, VA and HACU continue to ensure that the Hispanic community participates equitably in VA employment, education, program resources, and services. Furthermore, the Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP) is a cooperative education program established to provide high school and college students with valuable work experience, training, and education.

d) Finally, please describe any public/private partnerships your Department has or will undertake as part of your efforts to meet the educational needs of Hispanic Americans.

VA will continue to strive to meet the educational needs of Hispanic Americans. As an example of this effort, VA partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission

to establish a summer youth program in San Antonio, Texas. Fifty-three students were enrolled in the program. Of those, 46 were Hispanic Americans. Additionally, VA has partnered with CMS and Patterson High School to establish a similar program in Baltimore, Maryland, and it also partnered with Leto High School in Tampa, Florida, to establish a youth program in the Tampa Bay area. Washington, DC, has been designated as the next city to implement the initiative. VA plans to implement this initiative nationwide and will be seeking additional public/private partnerships to meet the educational needs of Hispanic Americans.

VA continues to strengthen its collaborative efforts with HACU. A total of 84 interns participated in VA's Summer 2002 National Internship Program. Sixty-one of those internships were supported by VA's Memorandum of Understanding with HACU. With this level of participation, VA continues to rank among the top Federal agencies supporting the HACU National Internship Program.

On January 17, 2002, VA entered into a partnership with the Interamerican College of Physicians and Surgeons (ICPS). This partnership agreement was to provide the cooperative framework for a mutually beneficial working relationship between ICPS and VA to recruit, train, develop, retain, and involve Hispanics in the VA workforce. ICPS reaches a vast majority of the Hispanic medical community in the United States and Puerto Rico—more than 39,000 physicians and a growing number of health professionals in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Spain—through its publications, conferences, and links to Hispanic medical societies.

The National Cemetery Administration is creating a project called the Youth Education And Resource Network (YEARN). The project will partner with middle schools and high schools nationwide and offer students and their parents exposure and insight into educational opportunities and resources. It is also an excellent way to develop an educational pipeline.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) offers special training opportunities for Hispanic Americans through the "Research Training Initiative for Hispanic-Serving Institutions" program. The VA Medical Centers recruit participants to the program and provide salary and research funds to support collaborative and training research activities at VA Medical Centers and participating colleges or universities. The program provides financial support through two mechanisms:

1. The Collaborative Research Program. This program aims to further collaboration between VA researchers and faculty scientists from eligible minority-serving academic institutions. The objective of the program is to promote and facilitate the pursuit of biomedical research within these academic institutions, to provide periods of concentrated research activity for the participating faculty scientists, and to provide research training experiences for the students from these institutions.

2. The Research Experience Program. This program encourages students (postdoctoral fellows, graduates, and undergraduates) and faculty members from eligible academic institutions to participate in the research enterprise of VA for a limited period of time (a summer, a semester, or one to two years). Participating faculty members can advance their scientific skills and pursue specific research projects under the tutelage of established VA investigators. On return to the home institution, faculty members are prepared to conduct independent research with their advanced knowledge and skills. The program objective is to encourage matriculation in medical and graduate programs and provide current and future employment possibilities.

Medical Research Service has continued to promote these programs through various national meetings including those focused on minority education excellence.