

Back to School: Challenges and Opportunities for Hispanic and Latine Students



**HISPANIC/LATINO
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

By

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Overview

Schools can play a pivotal role in fostering Hispanic and Latine student's wellbeing and the potential to serve as a safe haven in their development. In doing so it is crucial to recognize and sensibly address the numerous challenges that may impact Hispanic and Latine student's behavioral health. This factsheet highlights these challenges, including the effects of isolation, discrimination, and unattended needs which can exacerbate stress and trauma. By understanding and responding to their unique experiences, educators and communities can help empower Hispanic and Latine students to thrive.

Challenges

- **Language Barriers:** Language other than English is the primary home language (Spanish, Portuguese, indigenous languages, ex K'iche'), returning to an English-dominated school environment can be a difficult transition.
- **Access to academic and educational resources:** Potentially less access to educational enrichment programs, extracurricular activities, or mental health services resulting in learning loss or summer slide.
- **Financial Strain:**
 - Absence of school-provided meals and other resources means increased household expenses and increased stress on students.
 - Some students may work to help their families, juggling school and work or shifting back to a student role may be difficult.
- **Pressure to Succeed:** Pressure to excel academically to overcome stereotypes, meet family expectations and benefit from educational opportunities others haven't had access to.
- **Isolation, Discrimination and Bias:**
 - Difficulty reintegrating into the school environment, feel disconnected from peers if they spent the summer isolated or adultified.
 - Face discrimination, bias or feel unwelcome at school. The current political climate, especially with the 2024 presidential election approaching, has introduced heightened polarization and anti-immigrant rhetoric.
- **Trauma:** Immigration-related stress or exposure to violence can be re-triggered by the return to school, where they might not feel safe or supported.
- **Unmet Mental Health Needs:** Mental health needs that are accessed through the school due to lack of culturally or linguistically competent care, accessibility and inadequate services in the neighborhood, stigma around accessing mental health.

The **CDC** reports that:
41% of Latine high school students have **felt sad or hopeless** compared to **36%** of their white peers
This level of emotional distress can significantly impact their academic performance and overall well-being.

The **suicide attempt rate** for Latine high school students is **10.5%**, higher than the **7.3%** rate for their white peers.

32% of Latine high school students **experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness**, **28%** compared to of non-Hispanic white students.

Mental health issues contribute to higher dropout rates among Latine students.

The dropout rate for Latine students is **8.2%**, vs. national average of **5.3%**

Opportunities

- **Listen and connect with students:** Genuinely listen to student needs and offer meaningful options including just a safe space to share and process their experience.
- **Create a welcoming and inclusive environment:** Explicitly welcome students with multilingual and diverse signage. Explicitly explain safety and privacy practices and legal access to education. Model tolerance and actively demonstrate intolerance of racism, violence and xenophobic by holding behaviors accountable.
- **Slow down to speed up, creating meaningful connections:** Dedicate time to getting to know students, warmly welcoming families and bridging cultures.
- **Help meet students and family's needs:** Demonstrate your understanding of priorities and needs of students, families as well as your investment in the community by providing holistic wraparound resources ranging from hygiene supplies to health and medical services, clothing to adult education classes.

The Hispanic/Latino Behavioral Health Center of Excellence recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification, as well as the right of all individuals to self-identify. HLBH CoE uses the term Latine with the intention of both facilitating fluent reading and pronunciation and supporting an inclusive and respectful language. Latine is a gender-neutral form of the word Latino that uses the letter e at the end, an idea native to the Spanish language.

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REFERENCES