Richard Fry, PEW Hispanic Center

Hispanic High School Completion: The Role and Value of the GED

DISCUSSION

WE KNOW THIS ABOUT HISPANIC EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT:

- HS dropout rates are very high
- Most of us who do finish HS, don't go on to college
- Most who do go to college cluster in two-year schools and few of these students go on to BA-level programs
- Most who do seek the BA, earn below-average GPAs and drop out rates are high, again
- Those few who do graduate:
  - Do just as well as anyone else in postgraduate programs
  - Earn significantly higher incomes without grad school

THIS STUDY HIGHLIGHTS AN AREA OF CONCERN THAT HASN'T REALLY BEEN ON THE RADAR

- Hispanics dropouts are much less likely to earn their GEDS
  - Depending primarily on nativity
    - Country of origin
    - Age of entry into the U.S.
    - English proficiency
    - Time in country
  - May be part of the assimilation or culturalization process

OPTIONS FOR GED COMPLETION TEND TO EXCLUDE HISPANIC DROPOUTS, ESPECIALLY IMMIGRANTS

1, Study or take a GED course

   not likely—given the reasons for dropping out in the first place

2. Go to prison

   not likely—crimes rates for Hispanics are low, especially for immigrants

3. Enroll in a manpower or training program

   not likely—immigrants have less access

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE ANALYSIS

- Are the relatively low levels of GED attainment a Hispanic problem or an assimilation problem?
- Extend the breakdown of GED attainment to other immigrant groups for comparison
  - Do non-Hispanic immigrants who drop out have higher probabilities of completing the GED?
  - A comparison of native-born and immigrants Africans would be interesting

WHAT ABOUT SELECTION EFFECTS?

- Is the earnings differential for GED versus HS diploma explained by employer views of diplomas earned aboard?
  - If so, might this be an indication of higher equivalency
- Or are immigrants who earn GEDs especially motivated to improve their labor market outcomes?
- Oaxaca decompositions might reveal differences in characteristics

ARE THERE POLICY IMPLICATIONS?

- Low GED attainment might improve by getting more information to Hispanic immigrants about the benefits of earning a GED
- Especially information that the exams are available in Spanish
- Classes might be geared specifically to Hispanic immigrant populations