

Houston area survey: African-Americans are the most likely to value postsecondary education

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African-Americans are the most likely of all ethnic groups to emphasize the importance of postsecondary education, according to the 2013 Houston Education Survey. This and other findings were revealed in the first-of-its-kind report from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

The survey offers a comprehensive look at Harris County residents' attitudes toward education, their aspirations for their children, their evaluations of the public schools and their support for a variety of reform proposals.

Importance of education

One of the study's key findings is that African-Americans (at 90 percent) were the most likely to insist that success today requires education beyond [high school](#), followed by Asians (at 85 percent) and Latinos (at 78 percent). Anglos (at 64 percent) were the least inclined to say that postsecondary education is necessary for success in today's economy. Moreover, fully 92 percent of all parents with school-aged children (regardless of ethnicity) said they hoped their child will be able, at a minimum, to graduate from college.

"The survey provides no evidence whatsoever to support the belief that blacks or Latinos do not value education as much as Anglos and Asians

do," said survey author Stephen Klineberg, Kinder Institute co-director and Rice professor of sociology. "The educational disparities have much more to do with resources and income inequalities than with any presumed differences in aspirations or values."

According to Klineberg, the coming together of globalization and automation has created a new kind of economy in Houston and America, one in which the good blue-collar jobs are disappearing and income inequalities are rapidly growing, predicated primarily on the attainment of high-quality education.

Klineberg noted that Harris County residents now clearly understand these new realities, with more than three-fourths of the survey participants asserting that success today requires education beyond high school; less than a fifth believed instead that there are many ways to succeed with no more than a [high school diploma](#).

"In the new economy, education matters more today than ever before in American history," said Klineberg. "If Houston's young people, 70 percent of whom are African American and Hispanic, are unprepared to succeed in today's knowledge economy, it is difficult to envision a prosperous future for the region as a whole."

Quality of education

The respondents were divided (48 responding "yes," 46 percent responding "no") on whether public schools in the Houston area "have enough money, if it were used wisely, to provide a quality education." The number calling for more spending climbed to 55 percent among those living in the service area of Houston Independent School District (HISD).

"The public's recognition of the need for additional funds was confirmed

in the 2012 election, when a whopping 69 percent approved a \$1.89 billion bond to upgrade or rebuild the HISD schools," Klineberg said.

Survey participants who had children in the public schools were more likely than those without school-aged children to believe that the schools in their district have been getting better. They were far more inclined than those without school-aged children (by 74 to 57 percent) to give high grades (A's and B's) to the [public schools](#) in their district, and especially (with 85 percent A's or B's) to the schools their own children were attending.

Educational disparities

When asked about the importance of different factors that contribute to the educational achievement gaps, the respondents viewed parental involvement and student effort as more critical than the quality of teaching or the impact of poverty. Nevertheless, 80 percent cited differences in teaching quality and 72 percent thought that "poverty, crime and instability in the communities where the students live" were among the most important contributors to ethnic differences in educational outcomes.

"Just 10 percent of Anglo children—but more than a third of black and Latino children—are living in poverty," Klineberg said. "And these stark differences in income and wealth are surely critical factors in generating the achievement gaps."

According to HISD records, fewer than 7 percent of all black and Latino high school seniors in 2011 scored at or above the level that indicates college readiness on standardized tests.

"Because of inadequate preparation for college work, because so many also need to work while enrolled in classes and because of the

continually increasing tuition costs coupled with inadequate financial aid, far too few of Houston's young people are able to go to college or to make it through to graduation," the report said.

Educational initiatives

The survey asked about a variety of proposals for school reform. More than 60 percent favored spending more for after-school programs, for expanding the school day and year and for establishing more charter schools. The respondents gave their strongest support (at 70 percent) to "paying for universal preschool education to ensure that all low-income children are ready for kindergarten."

"This represents a strong consensus on the importance of providing universal access to quality [early childhood education](#)," Klineberg said. "More generally, it reflects the broader finding that Harris County residents are increasingly coming to recognize the critical importance of improved education for Houston's prospects."

"Human resources are now more important than natural resources in building the conditions for prosperity," the report concludes. "If Houston is to succeed in this high-tech, global, knowledge-based economy, it will need to provide considerably greater access to quality [education](#), starting in early childhood, proceeding through high school and college and into lives of continual learning."

Provided by Rice University

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