



Thursday, May 8, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Club at BCC guided Hispanic students

By Lynn Thompson
Seattle Times Eastside bureau

In organizing Interlake Hispanic students last fall, Osbaldo Hernandez was following the lead of Bellevue Community College (BCC) students who formed a Latin American Culture Club in 2005. The group visited Eastside high schools with the aim of encouraging more Hispanics to think about college.

Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 24 now account for 12 percent of Washington's population, but just 5 percent were enrolled in state public, four-year schools in 2006. The number attending community colleges is much higher, with Hispanics making up 14 percent of students in 2006, according to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

"It's on everybody's mind," said Bob Burdick, of the state Higher Education Coordinating Board. "People of color are the most rapidly growing segment of the school-age population but they have some very low college participation rates."

Jose Vasquez, 23, a former BCC student who is now a business major at the University of Washington, said many Hispanic high-school students think a high GPA or SAT is required for college.

Vasquez, one of the founders of the BCC outreach group, said one of the group's aims is to tell Hispanics that community colleges accept students with a wide range of academic achievement. Community colleges also serve as a platform for those with limited financial means to move on to a four-year college.

"Most of these students are the first in their families to go to college. They don't have role models. They don't have someone to guide and motivate them to stay in school," Vasquez said.

Herman Calzadillas, outreach director for Lake Washington Technical College in Kirkland, agreed that Hispanic students need to see people like themselves who have gone on to college and successfully entered professions.

"They need to know that there are examples of Latino success," he said.

Lynn Thompson; 206-464-8305 or lthompson@seattletimes.com.

Seattle Times reporter Ashley Bach contributed to this report.

Copyright © 2008 The Seattle Times Company