



BEHIND THE STORY

Wide Response to Educational Plight of Mexican Immigrants

 FACEBOOK TWITTER PRINT

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By KIRK SEMPLE

A freelance marketing specialist sent an e-mail. So did a professor in Dallas. There were others from lawyers, bankers, students and teachers. Most of the writers were Mexican-American. All wanted to help.

QUESTION

How can Mexican immigrant students be helped to succeed?

Angelo Cabrera, head of a small nonprofit organization in the Bronx that tutors Mexican and Mexican-American children, has been fielding scores of such e-mails and calls since [The New York Times published an article](#) on Friday about low rates of educational achievement among Mexican immigrants in New York City.

“People got touched by the story,” he said Monday. “It created a reaction, like, ‘I got to do something now.’”

The article generated a wide range of responses from readers in the United States and abroad who wrote e-mails and called The New York Times and sources quoted in the article, and posted comments on blogs, Facebook and Twitter.

In addition, Notimex, the Mexican news agency, wrote about the article, and its coverage was published by numerous Mexican news organizations, generating additional reaction.

Many readers expressed sadness, concern and alarm.

 Respond

Mr. Cabrera said people have offered to volunteer for his organization, [MASA-MexEd](#), helping with tutoring, grant-writing and fund-raising. New York City's [Department of Education](#) has also sought a meeting with him, he said.

At the same time, however, the article has also inspired less-generous reactions. Readers have argued that poor educational achievement among Mexican immigrants is a symptom of a broken immigration system and further reason to reduce the number of immigrants, both legal and illegal.

"With their lack of education and skills these are not the sort of people we want as future citizens," Judy W., a reader from Maryland, wrote on the paper's Web site. "Temporary visas, yes. Citizenship, no. We must deal with this problem which gets worse every day."

Andy, a reader who said he was from Maryland, posted a comment on the Web site arguing that the problem boiled down to a matter of culture.

"Based on my experience of living in Mexico for four years, I concluded that Mexicans simply do not value education as much as some segments of our population," he wrote. "It's simply not part of their ethos."

Andy's comment spurred a blogger at informate.tumblr.com to write: "Really? Because I could have sworn growing up my Mexican parents told me, 'Educar para que no sufras como nosotros,' " a Spanish sentence that means, "Educate yourself so that you don't suffer like us."

The blogger continued: "While I'm certainly not the rule or the exception to the rule, it's because of my Mexican culture that I graduated valedictorian of my high school and attend one of the nation's most competitive and elite institutions. And the five Columbia University, Mexican-American, first-generation college students I hung out with tonight? Yeah, they grew up hearing the same thing."

The post was republished on many other blogs, including [Mex and the City](#), a site devoted to art and culture among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in New York.

Still other readers complained that the article, which focused on the first generation, did not pay sufficient attention to the higher academic achievement made by second- and later-generation Mexicans.

Robert C. Smith, a sociology professor at City University of New York who has studied and worked closely with the Mexican population, said that at least two colleagues expressed these concerns to him in an e-mail thread over the weekend.

"The worry is that this picture of bad educational statistics will be used to argue that Mexicans are unassimilable and therefore we should build a higher fence," he said. "The more complex picture shows that when you give somebody a chance, they do pretty well, and when you focus resources and attention on them like CUNY has done, things can go from bad to better."

One of the more unique reader responses arrived in the form of a YouTube video, posted by Sheila Carmody. She explained that it was the latest in a series of videos that seek to provide solutions to poor-performing schools. "It was prepared for the benefit of sharing solutions for the education system in N.Y.C.," she wrote in an e-mail.

The [five-minute video](#) features an interview with Lonnie Palmer, an education consultant and former schools superintendent in Albany. He offered suggestions for New York City's educators, administrators and advocates.

"If I were there as superintendent, I would try to hire an effective, well-known advocate for Mexican students and their parents to work with the school system and with the parents," he said. "It would be a great investment."