

New majority

Hispanics must succeed in order for the Houston region to prosper in the coming decades.

SPEAKING to a gathering of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Thursday, Rice University sociologist Stephen Kleinberg produced two statistics:

- 70 percent of Houstonians over the age of 60 are Anglo.
- 75 percent of Houstonians under the age of 30 are non-Anglo, mostly Hispanic.

The conclusion is obvious. In a few years Houston will be a predominantly Hispanic city. Further, if Hispanics don't prosper, Houston won't prosper.

The chamber's board of directors has concluded that the next 10 years will be a decade of great opportunity for Hispanics in the Houston region, and they're right. Houston's bilingual residents and immigrants from all over are ideally placed to compete in the global market.

The chamber has crafted a strategic plan to ensure that Hispanics here seize the day. The plan has three visions. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce will, among other things:

- Lead Houston's new majority. It will identify and develop Hispanic civic, business and government leaders, and craft solutions to problems affecting the Hispanic community.
- Plan and direct economic development and investment in the Hispanic community; promote Houston as a

gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean; and market Houston Hispanic businesses to the global economy.

- Be a catalyst for growth among Hispanic entrepreneurs; expand their access to capital; pursue public policies favorable to Hispanic business development; and increase the number of Hispanics in corporate management.

The chamber's strategic plan does not specifically address what must be regarded as the greatest barrier to Hispanic success: Houston's high dropout rate. At some high schools the graduating class is a third the size of the entering class, indicating a dropout rate exceeding 60 percent.

The chamber's directors state that, while the group is focused on improving Hispanics' lot in the Houston economy, they mean to be collaborative. This is an important point. It will take the efforts of the whole community to make sure Houston and its residents — soon to be majority Hispanic — prosper in the coming years.

Rice's Kleinberg points out that Houston's diverse population now looks like how America's population will come to look. Houston, he said, is where America's future will be worked out.

The Chronicle congratulates the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for doing its constructive and cooperative part.