



Latinos Start Behind, Stay Behind in the Public School System

Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Closing the Achievement Gap

Who We Are

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum strives to improve education outcomes by conducting analysis to inform, influence and lead, all with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future for Illinois.

The Challenge

Illinois Latinos lag behind their peers before they even set foot in kindergarten. This gap persists as

Latino students advance through the public school system. It's not surprising that these

frustrating trends lead to dismal high school graduation rates: These youth are almost as likely to drop out as they are to finish, a troubling statistic given that 1-in-5 students in Illinois schools is Latino.



Photo Credit: Olga Lopez

Lean economic times threaten funding for these vital programs at both the state and federal levels. Budget cuts threaten to reduce the availability of quality, accessible preschools, which are already in short supply in Latino communities: Only 1-in-3 Latino children is enrolled in preschool in Illinois, compared with almost two-thirds of other children. However, research shows that early childhood education is a sound investment, with every dollar invested yielding a \$10 return in the form of increased school and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice costs.

Where We Are Headed

Illinois recently upped the ante in addressing these stubborn achievement gaps, with legislation mandating that children have access to preschool programs in their native language. In a state where one-fifth of residents speak a language other than English, it is vital that its English-language learners—many of whom are Latino—have the best shot at building a solid academic foundation.

Our Response

The Latino Policy Forum is working to ensure Latino children have access to high quality early childhood services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. We are also advancing a collective policy agenda on issues that have an impact on young Latino learners with the Early Childhood Education *Acuerdo* (Accord) work group, and educating the field on the impact of new legislation, including Illinois' trailblazing new bilingual preschool mandate.

Learn More: To find out more about our work, visit our website at: www.latinopolicyforum.org.

Contact Us: Sara McElmurry, Communications Manager, smcelmurry@latinopolicyforum.org