



phone 312-376-1766
fax 312-376-1760
web latinopolicyforum.org
20 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 12, 2009

Contact:
Alejandra Moran (708) 715-6495

Early Childhood Education Symposium in Illinois First Ever to Focus on Policy Priorities to Help Latino Children; Report Released Calls for Solutions to Close the Educational Achievement Gap

Chicago, IL—One out of every three newborns in the Chicago area is now Latino. Therefore, closing the Latino educational achievement gap through policies that improve access to and quality of early childhood education programs is no longer a luxury: It is vital to the region's economic prosperity. The Latino Policy Forum, whose mission it is to increase the power, influence and leadership of the Latino community, and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S., partnered with leading experts today to host the first ever Illinois symposium to identify policy priorities to improve the quality of early childhood education programs for Latino children. The symposium was funded through the help of The McCormick Foundation.

The symposium's keynote speaker, Eugene Garcia—co-chair of the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics and a member of President Obama's Education Transition Team—discussed his groundbreaking research in the field of effective schooling for linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. A panel of policymakers and early childhood practitioners responded by suggesting policy solutions.

“A growing body of research suggests that high-quality early childhood programs can help improve school readiness and future academic achievement,” Garcia said. “However, there is a need to develop effective strategies to improve Latino outcomes in early childhood programs.”

During the panel, the Latino Policy Forum released its report, *Transforming Early Learning*, which provides early childhood program administrators, stakeholders and policymakers an enhanced understanding of the socio-demographic characteristics of Latino children and their families. The report also concludes that effectively addressing the needs of Latino children requires a deliberate and well-informed process of institutional adaption. This rapidly growing segment of the population will require policy changes and access to early childhood education programs that are culturally and linguistically appropriate if all Illinois children are to get the most out of their schools.

“We need to provide our Latino children with the education today that will bring them the success they deserve tomorrow,” said Sylvia Puente, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum. “Illinois cannot and will not prosper if Latino children are left behind.”

In addition, the report suggests that through a deliberate consideration of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Latino children would soar through participation in programs administered by Latino-serving, community-based organizations that have successful strategies that can be replicated.

“Greater investments in high-quality early childhood education programs can increase Latino children’s success for the rest of their school years and well into adulthood,” said Janet Murguía, President and CEO of NCLR. “As we documented in NCLR’s report *Buenos Principios*, one of the best ways to close the educational gap is to reach these kids early through the community-based organizations they are already familiar with.”

Even though Illinois is a leader in early childhood education programs, there are misperceptions about why fewer Latino children are enrolled in such programs. Availability, lack of information about eligibility, high cost, and poor outreach have put Latinos behind in the school system. There is a resounding call for system-wide education policy change that will create the platform to increase Latino participation in these programs.

Other panelists at today’s symposium held at the National-Louis University in Chicago included:

- Erika Beltran, NCLR
- Reyna Hernandez, Latino Policy Forum
- Celena Roldán, Erie Neighborhood House
- Nancy Shier, Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Clara Lopez, El Valor
- Ellen Chavez, Casa Central
- Kay Henderson, Illinois State Board of Education
- Linda Saterfield, Illinois Department of Human Services
- Mary Ellen Caron, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services
- Barbara Bowman, Chicago Public Schools
- Dr. Kathleen Sheridan, National-Louis University
- Ric Estrada, Erie Neighborhood House

The McCormick Foundation—The McCormick Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to strengthening our free, democratic society by investing in children, communities, and country. Through its five grantmaking programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, and three world-class museums, the Foundation helps build a more active and engaged citizenry. It was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago*

Tribune. The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest charities, with more than \$1 billion in assets.

Latino Policy Forum—The Latino Policy Forum provides analysis with a Latino perspective and convenes sectors of the community to engage in the policy debate and advocacy activities on issues critical to the region. The mission of the Latino Policy Forum is to increase power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community.

National Council of La Raza—The largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States, NCLR works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Consistent with its mission to improve opportunities and open doors for the Latino community, NCLR believes that advocacy, civic engagement, and community-based support are essential parts of any community-empowerment strategy. Thus, NCLR carries out concerted advocacy activities at both the state and local levels.

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