

Shaping Our Future

**Building a Collective Latino
K-12 Education Agenda**

June 2012





PREPARED BY THE LATINO POLICY FORUM

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Mission/Vision

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, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community. It does this by conducting analysis to inform, influence, and lead, all with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future.

Our mission: To build the power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well-being of our community and society as a whole

The Latino Policy Forum works to ensure that all Latino children have access to high-quality education services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

“Never before have we been faced with a population group on the verge of becoming the majority in significant portions of the country that is also the lowest performing academically. And never before has the economic structure been less forgiving to the undereducated”

Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009)

The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies

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The views expressed in this report are explicitly those of the Latino Policy Forum and should not be taken to represent the views of any of our contributors, volunteers, committee members, or their affiliated organizations.

Preface

June 2012

The Latino Policy Forum's inaugural publication, *An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective*, published in April 2008, articulated the concerns of 600 Latino nonprofit and civic leaders, convened to rank the issues that mattered to their communities. Amongst dialogue over challenges related to immigration, housing, health, workforce development, community safety, and a bevy of other issues, education overwhelmingly emerged as the top priority for the Latino community.

From there, an imperative was born: The Forum launched an ambitious Early Childhood Education effort to advance a collective policy agenda on issues that have an impact on young Latino learners, convening leadership from community-based early care providers and educating the field on the implications of state-level legislation. Efforts have boosted Latino children's access to quality, culturally relevant early childhood education, critical for fostering success in the classroom and on to a career.

But our work is far from finished. Building on the Forum's track record of success in Latino-specific early childhood education efforts, this report, *Shaping Our Future: Building a Collective Latino K-12 Education Agenda*, is a first step toward ensuring that hard-won gains for our youngest Latino learners are not lost as these students transition into Illinois' often disjointed K-12 system. *Shaping Our Future* lifts the Latino voice in Illinois' ongoing educational reform debate, offering a framework for building and providing a culturally relevant, quality education for the Latino youth who now represent nearly one in every four students in Illinois classrooms — and are a growing proportion of our regional workforce.

Beyond a simple continuation of our efforts in improving Latino educational outcomes, *Shaping Our Future* represents an affirmation of our commitment to working hand-in-hand with the community. The issue analysis and policy directions detailed on the following pages were developed in consultation with the nearly 30 members of our dedicated K-12 Advisory Committee, and were vetted through the nearly 200 passionate community members and educational stakeholders who braved the Chicago cold one Saturday morning in February to participate in our inaugural Latino Education Summit.

Shaping Our Future is the scaffolding of an ambitious educational agenda. The Forum looks forward to constructing change by working in partnership with community allies, elected officials, and the scores of talented, tireless Illinois educators who have dedicated their lives to teaching our children. Bolstering the academic success of Latino learners is a critical imperative in building a better future for us all.



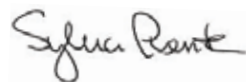
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Executive Summary

The U.S. student body today is more ethnically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse than ever. Our nation's future and global competitiveness rest on the successful human capital investment in our country's youth, particularly for Latinos—one of the fastest growing segments of the population. More and more, quality jobs demand increased knowledge, skills, and higher levels of education. The United States, however, remains challenged in preparing its students for college, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, reading, and English. Within this context, Latino students continue to demonstrate some of the lowest education achievement levels in the country and in Illinois.

Yet if the cultural and linguistic contributions of Latino children are upheld as assets, the dramatic growing diversity fortifies U.S. competitiveness in an increasingly interconnected global marketplace. Ensuring positive outcomes for Latino students is no longer simply a *Latino* issue. The well-being of Latinos—a population that has increased by nearly 500,000 or 32 percent over the last decade—is inextricably linked with the well-being of all of Illinois. A lack of concerted investment in Latino academic success is a neglected opportunity for addressing underachievement and building a better Illinois comprised of healthy families, safe communities, economic prosperity, and enhanced civic participation.

Illinois is on the cusp of great educational change, yet it remains frustrating that one of its largest groups of students falls woefully behind. The Latino Policy Forum believes that a discrete, Latino-specific focus, while urgently needed, has yet to be fully articulated and integrated into education policy in this state.

Building on its track record of success in Latino-specific early childhood education efforts, the Forum is expanding its work into a bold education agenda. This report constitutes the first steps toward setting the organization's education initiative. The Forum's targeted long-term outcomes for its K-12 agenda include (1) stronger academic achievement for Latino students and (2) reduced achievement gaps between Latino and non-Latino students.

This report is a call to action for the Forum and educators, school districts, organizations, parents, and community members to articulate and include Latino concerns within K-12 education reform. It is a critical starting point to reach the goal that all Latino children from birth to twelfth grade have access to high quality education that is linguistically and culturally appropriate and places them firmly on a path to college and career success.

The report entails the following:

- Background demographic and other information regarding Latino educational achievement in Illinois.
- Identification of key education policy issues, including: raising academic and instructional standards, preparing teachers and academic leadership, addressing funding and facility concerns, and fostering partners in education.
- Exploration of the impact of these issues on Latino students in grades K-12.
- Policy and practice directions for change.
- Action steps for advancing the Forum's K-12 agenda.

Building the Agenda: Critical Issues and Policy Directions

Current education outcomes for Latinos are grim, particularly in terms of their school dropout rates. In response, a number of initiatives have been launched targeting Latino high school students in an effort to nurture their postsecondary success. Interventions in high school, however, can often be too late. Research suggests that indicators predictive of high school dropout can be identified as early as third grade: feelings of low scholastic self-esteem, poverty, low reading skills, and truancy. Academic failure in early grades can have a devastating impact on students.

Birth to age five are among the most important years in influencing a child's foundation for learning and academic success. This fact renders investments in high quality early education a cost-effective strategy.

Research contends, nevertheless, that the positive outcomes of quality Pre-K programs do not always continue during and after the transition to grade school. This downward trend is far from inevitable. Studies also illustrate that the benefits of children's early education can continue uninterrupted if and when Pre-K programming is linked with the elementary grades—this would include a shared structure and an articulated set of scholastic and social objectives.

While all students would benefit from the integrated Pre-K to third grade approach, special considerations for Latino students remain necessary. The following key issue areas are explored and include their specific impact on Latino students.

Raising Academic and Instructional Standards

Efforts to improve instruction for Latino students must take into account factors associated with curriculum, instruction, early tracking, assessments, complexities of language development, and expectations for achievement.

Policy directions under consideration include high academic and instructional standards for Latino students that:

- ▶ Advocate for culturally and linguistically relevant academic content assessments taking into account degrees of linguistic development.
- ▶ Expect a diversity of assessments and appropriate teacher preparation and professional development to use them.
- ▶ Expect that more Latino students complete college preparatory coursework and address their overrepresentation in remedial-level tracks.
- ▶ Require research-based instruction, curriculum, and teacher preparation that aligns across classrooms, schools, and districts (birth to three, ECE, and K-12).
- ▶ Encourage availability of appropriate resources to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, data collection and analysis, time for teacher collaboration, appropriately trained counselors, after school tutoring and enrichment programs, and others).
- ▶ Advocate for access to quality curriculum, academic standards, and adequate student and family counseling services that foster college preparation and/or postsecondary success.
- ▶ Expect multilingual education as a central strategy for academic achievement (i.e. world language and culture, social and academic language, dual language programming, heritage language education, and others).

Preparing Teachers and Academic Leadership

The cornerstone of teacher effectiveness is how well they are prepared to teach and, the Forum would add, how deep their cultural understanding is of the children who are in their classrooms. For the growing Illinois Latino student population, this would include appropriate preparation and professional development to develop teachers' ability to understand and work with students of various cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Challenges associated with limited understanding about their backgrounds, along with engaging families who have limited English language skills, could be overcome by increasing the number of well-prepared bilingual and bicultural educators.

Bolstering the quantity of well-prepared bilingual and bicultural educators is a multipronged approach. Steps towards securing this goal often aim to ensure that more teachers acquire the bilingual endorsement in addition to a teaching certificate. Largely marginalized, however, is the fact that mainstream teachers are often unaware of how to support the learning and development of bicultural and bilingual students. This implies that instead of a bilingual endorsement add-on to a teacher preparation program, each teacher preparation program itself (early childhood, elementary, middle school, secondary, special education, etc.) would prepare its candidates to be competent bilingual and bicultural educators.

Policy directions under consideration promote quality preparation and continuous professional development programs for educators to work with the growing Latino student population. Such programs:

- ▶ Promote cultural, racial, and linguistic competencies among educators and administrators.
- ▶ Expect that appropriate resources are available to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, support and mentorship, data collection and analysis, time for teacher collaboration, and others).
- ▶ Promote Latino and low-income student access to highly qualified teachers.
- ▶ Encourage racial and cultural diversity within the educator and leadership workforce (i.e. teachers, administrators, board members, elected officials, paraprofessionals, etc.).
- ▶ Foster appropriate certifications, endorsements, field practicums, and postsecondary course offerings for both mainstream teachers and those specifically in bilingual classrooms.

Addressing Funding and Facility Concerns

Low-income students and students of color often receive fewer of the necessary resources to excel academically. Latinos (46 percent) and African Americans (44 percent) are more likely to at-

tend schools within high poverty urban areas compared to just 10 percent of Whites. Equitable learning conditions are necessary to ensure the postsecondary success of *all* students. Inequitable resource allocation influences staffing, facility conditions, access to quality textbooks and equipment, overcrowding, and the availability and use of demanding academic coursework. A central limitation to current school financing formulas is the substantial dependence on local property taxes which limits under-resourced schools.

Policy directions under consideration aim to ensure that education funding and facilities meet the needs of all Latino children. The goals are to:

- ▶ Advocate for increased state aid, including an increased poverty allocation.
- ▶ Advocate for appropriate per-pupil funding.
- ▶ Advocate for facilities that are safe and well-equipped.
- ▶ Promote access to relevant and up-to-date technology.
- ▶ Promote that existing facilities and school buildings accommodate Latino population growth.
- ▶ Encourage equitable strategies that apply to various geographic regions (i.e. urban, suburban, and rural).
- ▶ Promote appropriate taxation and funding distribution strategies.
- ▶ Advocate for inclusion of the Latino community in public discussions of school closings, turnarounds, and relocations.

Fostering Partners in Education

Involved communities—from cradle to career—are critical for supporting academic achievement and labor market success. Schools, especially those with high Latino populations, greatly benefit from tapping into community resources—families, care-givers, community-based organizations, local businesses, foundations, faith-based organizations—that can work together to facilitate student learning.

Families, in particular, equipped with the knowledge to promote child enrichment activities can foster vocabulary development, academic performance, and an overall curiosity for learning. Quality parent and familial programming have also been shown to improve children’s perceptions about school, increase attendance, and decrease dropout rates.

Policy directions under consideration aim to promote high quality continuous partnerships that foster Latino student achievement to:

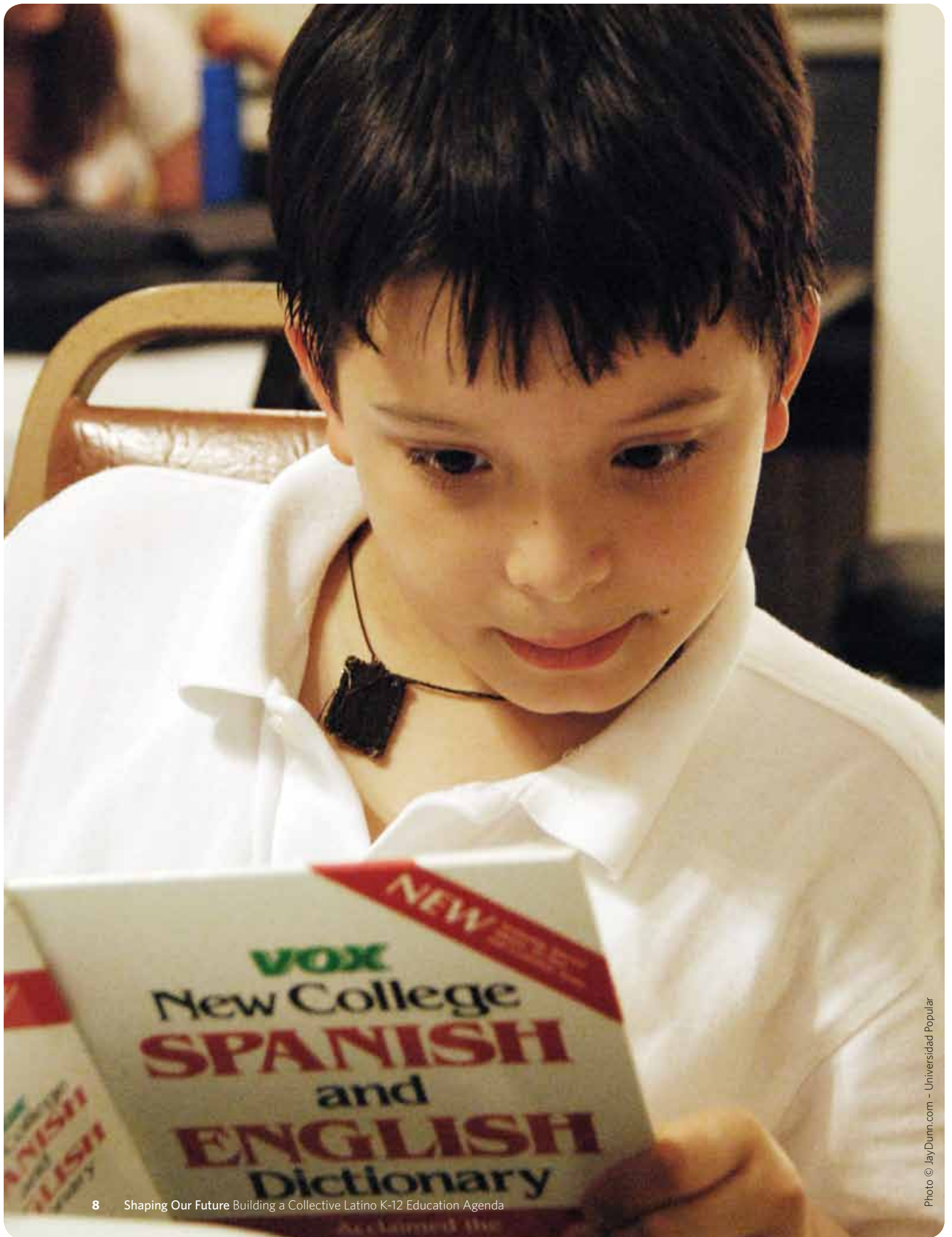
- ▶ Advance the participation of many partners (i.e. families, community-based organizations, foundations, local businesses, faith-based organizations, school-based health organizations, and others) at the district, school, and classroom levels.
- ▶ Promote opportunities for parent education, participation, personal development, and empowerment.
- ▶ Foster a college-going culture among Latinos by promoting the inclusion of college and university collaborations at all levels of education.
- ▶ Advocate for and with community partners to meet a broader set of student needs (including public and mental health, Dream Act, teen parenting, gang prevention, peer pressures, and others).
- ▶ Advocate for quality mentoring and internship programs.
- ▶ Expect that appropriate resources are available to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, support and mentorship, research and analysis on effective strategies, appropriately trained school counselors, assistance with navigating higher education and financial aid, and others).

Recommendations for Latino Policy Forum Action Steps

- Become a dependable and consistent source for all stakeholders in Illinois regarding Latino educational concerns through the provision of reports, data analyses, white papers, commentary, media stories, and editorials.
- Produce comprehensive publications and strategic reports with relevant data on Latinos in education beginning with this report.
- Foster collaborations with educators, school leadership, elected officials, parents, and community stakeholders to influence policy processes.
- Establish the Forum’s Education *Acuerdo* workgroup (*Acuerdo* is the Spanish word for agreement or accord) to build the policy-making and advocacy capacity of Latino organizations and leaders in Illinois. The *Acuerdo* will have one very fundamental and important function: to make sure that information, policy, and advocacy on education-specific issues represent the Latino perspective and its community needs.
- Work with *Acuerdo* to identify and advocate for specific policy initiatives based on the policy directions of this report. This entails integrating the concerns raised in this report into Illinois’ ongoing reform efforts.



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12



Setting the Stage: Latino Students in Illinois and the Education Reform Environment

Educational outcomes are influenced by numerous cumulative factors external to schools themselves (see Figure 1). Many Latino youth begin their lives challenged by poverty and economic insecurity, which, in turn, affects their readiness to learn. In 2009, 25 percent of Illinois Latino children lived below the poverty line compared to nine percent of White children.¹ Nationally, more than 6.1 million Latino children live in poverty—the first time this group has exceeded the number of White children in poverty.²

Figure 1. Contextual Forces Affecting Educational Outcomes

- **Early developmental needs:** low quality physical and mental healthcare, nutritional needs, and limited exposure to rich language environments, along with the subsequent cognitive development implications. These factors contribute to cultural, ethnic, and racial identity formation and eventual educational aspirations.
- **Family dynamics:** lower socioeconomic status and less multigenerational wealth transfers; less formal education levels of parents; increasing out-of-wedlock births; limited social and cultural capital to help navigate future educational opportunities; negative peer influences; and issues around frequent mobility and instability.
- **Community context:** neighborhood and school segregation, limited access to early childhood services, social services, healthcare, and recreational activities, along with heightened safety concerns.³

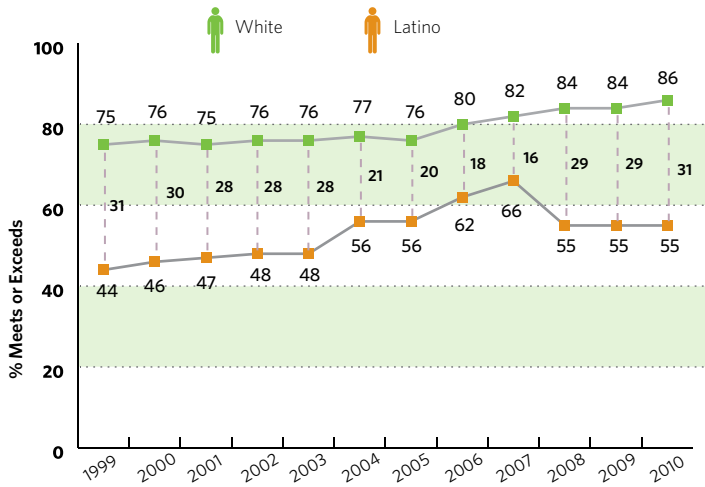
The correlation between economic advantage and scholastic performance is not news. Education is the critical avenue toward reaching middle-class status. In a society that has an increasing economic gap, the economic divide and its implications for scholastic achievement is an imperative not to be ignored.

A considerable body of research also illuminates the strong correlation between parental education and income and their children's scholastic achievement. National estimates indicate that close to 40 percent of Latino students have parents who have not finished high school, compared to just four percent of White parents. As a result of their lower levels of formal education, Latino parents can have limited knowledge about how to navigate U.S. school systems (e.g. advocating for placement in college preparatory classes) and less access to important social networks that can facilitate successful high school and college graduation.⁴

According to 2011 data from the Illinois State Board of Education, as seen in Figure 2, the achievement gap between White and Latino students in third grade reading narrowed in 2006 only to increase again by 2010. As Figures 3 and 4 illustrate, eighth grade reading levels narrowed over time and yet eleventh grade reading has remained stagnant over the decade. In addition, national estimates indicate that half of all Latinos in the U.S. earn their high school diploma on time, only 13 percent have earned a bachelor's degree, and a dismal four percent hold graduate or professional degrees.⁵

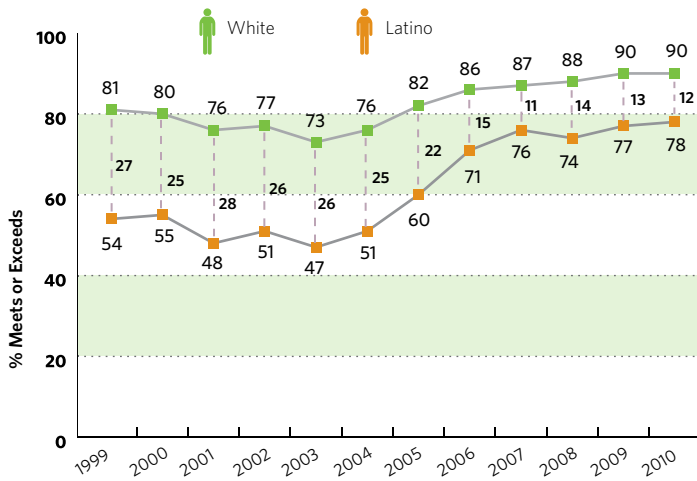
Ninety-two percent of Latino children are U.S.-born or naturalized citizens.⁶ Given these findings, it is increasingly urgent that Latinos have access to an educational system that prepares them to be competent, economically productive members of society, especially in a state as diverse as Illinois.

Figure 2. White/Latino Student Achievement Gap, 3rd Grade Reading, 2010



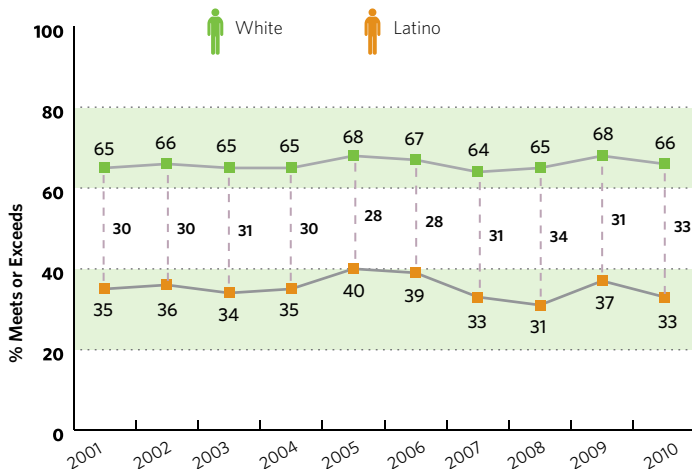
Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *Illinois interactive report card: Grade 3 ISAT achievement gap between Hispanic and White subgroups, reading 2010.*

Figure 3. White/Latino Student Achievement Gap, 8th Grade Reading, 2010



Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *Illinois interactive report card: Grade 8 ISAT achievement gap between Hispanic and White subgroups, reading 2010.*

Figure 4. White/Latino Student Achievement Gap, 11th Grade Reading, 2010



Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *Illinois interactive report card: Grade 11 ISAT achievement gap between Hispanic and White subgroups, reading 2010.*

According to data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2010-2011 academic year, Latinos comprise more than 22 percent of the total Illinois student population, an increase from 14 percent in 2000, as seen in Figures 5 and 6. This constitutes a growth of 52 percent over the decade. In Chicago Public Schools, they make up 43 percent of the student population, now being the largest cohort of students. This underscores the fact that during 2011, kindergarten, first, second, and third grade classes all had *minority-majority* student populations. Throughout the state, White student populations dipped below 50 percent for the first time, and Latinos represented approximately 25 percent of all students.

While the state's Latino population has traditionally lived within the City of Chicago, much of its growth over the past decade has been concentrated in Chicago suburbs (see Figure 7 for growth and Figures 8 through 10 for achievement scores). In 2010, 56 percent (265,545) of all Illinois Latino students were enrolled in the ten districts displayed in the graphs. It is important to note that 37 percent of Illinois Latinos were enrolled in Chicago Public Schools, while nearly two-thirds of Illinois Latino students were in the suburbs and downstate. In general, suburban school districts were not prepared to meet the growing diversity in their schools.

Despite its commanding size, the Latino population faces obstacles in obtaining quality education. Investments in Latino educational achievement needs to begin early: they are the least likely of all ethnic groups to attend preschool, with an estimated 35 percent enrollment rate compared to 54 and 66 percent for African American and White children respectively.⁷ Recent research in this area finds common obstacles to preschool attendance to include limited English language skills, lack of affordable programming, limited public programming in some Latino residential areas, and the disinclination for undocumented parents to use public benefits.⁸ As a result—before children even enter kindergarten—an education gap exists between them and their peers. According to data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, at the start of kindergarten many were already 19 points behind third generation White children in letter recognition. As early as third grade, they were 31 percentage points behind White students in reading and 22 points in math.

English Language Learners (ELLs), 86 percent of whom are Spanish-speaking,⁹ face even steeper challenges—by third grade they lag 48 points behind in reading and 22 points in math.¹⁰ Even as the current assessments of ELLs are greatly criticized, low scores remain a grave concern.

Such statistics are alarming, and these trends left unchecked will have devastating implications for Illinois: ensuring positive outcomes for their community is no longer simply a *Latino* issue. The well-being of Latinos—whose population has increased by nearly 500,000 (32 percent) over the last decade—is inextricably linked to the well-being of all of Illinois.¹¹

Strategic Study Approach

Through a seven-month process, the Latino Policy Forum sought to take a wider look at mitigating education achievement gaps for Latino students and ensuring that they have access to a high quality, culturally relevant K-12 education. The process entailed the following:

- Conducting an environmental scan that identified major education concerns and detailed the Latino-specific implications of each.
- Convening an education advisory committee to review, reflect on, and make suggestions to the Forum’s future education agenda.
- Organizing a one-day Latino Education Summit on February 11, 2012. (Nearly two hundred attendees provided broader stakeholder feedback on the issues the Forum identified.)
- Developing this report to include a strategic education work plan with priorities and recommendations. (For further details see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12.)

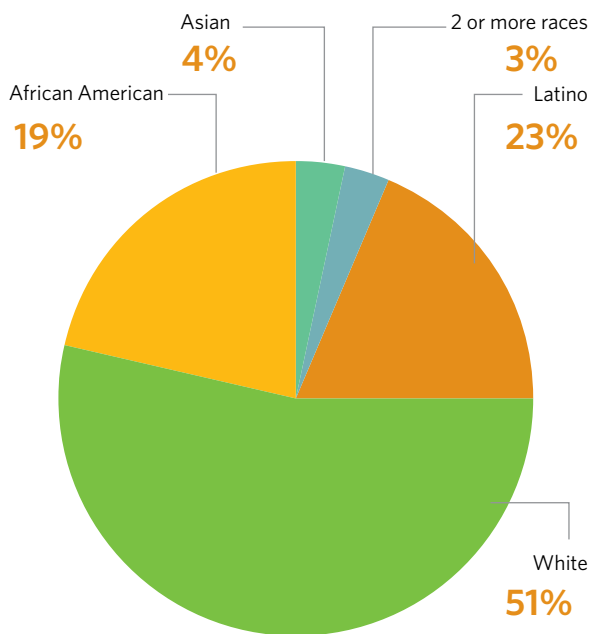
The Latino Policy Forum K-12 Advisory Committee

The advisory committee included education advocates, academics, school leaders, teachers, and parents from both Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. Three advisory meetings generated the following themes regarding Latino educational achievement:

- Recognize, value, and strengthen Latino student linguistic and cultural assets.
- Improve quality instruction and curriculum specifically for Latino students.
- Foster high expectations and standards for Latino scholastic achievement.
- Increase budgetary and other resource allocation to Latino-majority schools.
- Improve effective educational leadership and strengthen leadership development within the Latino population.
- Encourage family and community engagement to create a nurturing climate conducive to learning.

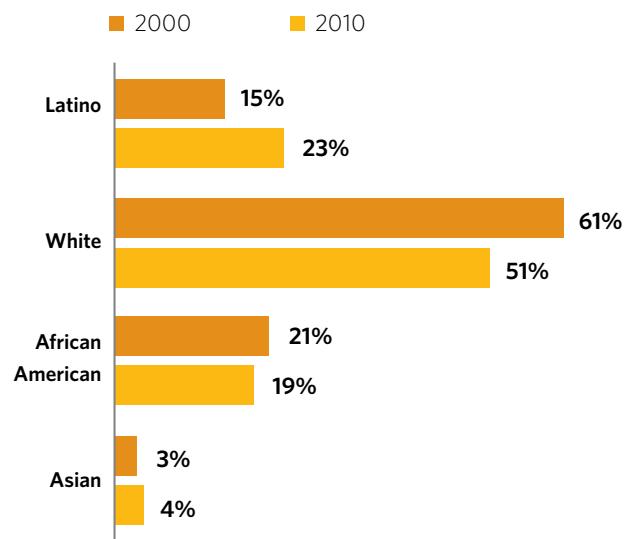
Through smaller breakout sessions, advisory members provided a passionate discourse about the various impediments to Latino academic achievement and potential solutions. The sessions also delved into the diversity within the Latino community: English-speaking students and ELLs and the geographical needs of city-based Latinos versus the continued growth of Latinos in the suburbs. Widely respected education research and data analyses support the themes and feedback generated by the advisory committee. (For a literature review and list of related, relevant research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12.)

Figure 5. Illinois K-12 Student Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2010



Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *2010-2011 district summary*.

Figure 6. Growth in Illinois K-12 Student Enrollment, 2000-2010



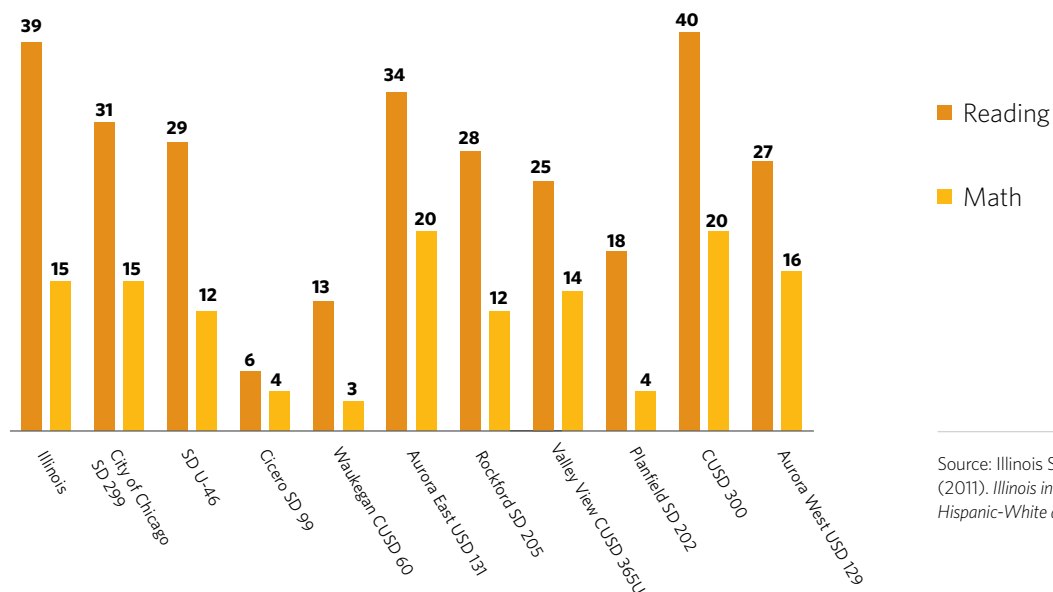
Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *2010 annual report*.
Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *2010-2011 district summary*.

Figure 7. Ten Largest Latino School Districts in Illinois

DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	LATINO ENROLLMENT	% LATINO	DISTRICT TYPE
Illinois	2,087,762	476,485	23%	
City of Chicago SD 299	409,255	177,857	43%	Unit
SD U-46 (Elgin and surrounding communities)	40,494	19,888	49%	Unit
Cicero SD 99	13,474	12,933	96%	Elementary
Waukegan CUSD 60	16,327	12,219	75%	Unit
Aurora East USD 131	13,435	11,236	84%	Unit
Rockford SD 205	29,351	7,200	25%	Unit
J S Morton HSD 201 (Cicero, Berwyn, Stickney)	8116	7085	87%	High School
Valley View CUSD 365U (Bolingbrook, Romeoville)	17695	6865	39%	Unit
Plainfield SD 202 (SW suburbs)	28839	6665	23%	Unit
CUSD 300 (Carpentersville)	20584	6597	32%	Unit

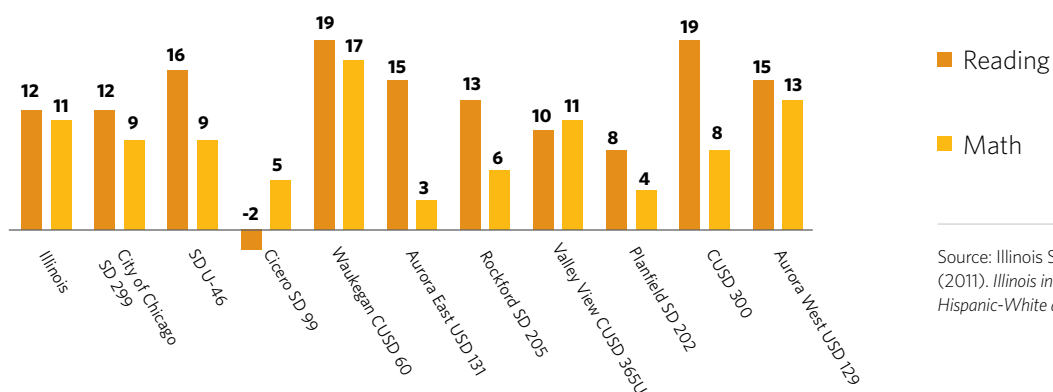
Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). 2010-2011 district summary.

Figure 8. Percent Point Achievement Gap in 3rd Grade ISAT Reading and Math, Ten Largest Latino Elementary Districts, 2010



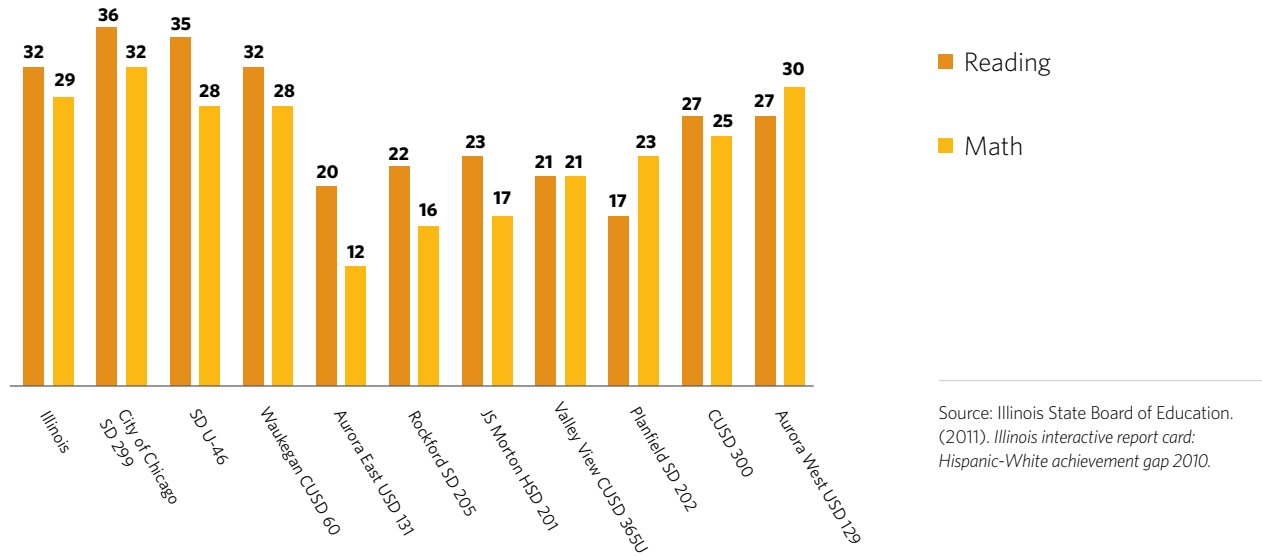
Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). Illinois interactive report card: Hispanic-White achievement gap 2010.

Figure 9. Percent Point Achievement Gap in 8th Grade ISAT Reading and Math, Ten Largest Latino Elementary Districts, 2010



Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). Illinois interactive report card: Hispanic-White achievement gap 2010.

Figure 10. Percent Point Achievement Gap in 11th Grade ACT College Readiness Reading and Math, Ten Largest Latino High School Districts, 2010




Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *Illinois interactive report card: Hispanic-White achievement gap 2010.*

Illinois Education Reform Context

Listed below are significant education reforms currently in place or under consideration that affect Illinois school-age children. When fully implemented, advocates hope that they will benefit all students, including Latinos. The critical challenge is to ensure that the importance of the Latino perspective is not lost as these reforms are implemented. The Forum will work to ensure that a Latino perspective is included in various reform efforts, such as (for a more detailed description of the reforms listed below, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12):

- The Illinois P-20 Council
- Promising Advances in Early Childhood Intervention
- Common Core Standards
- New Teacher and Principal Evaluations and Preparation Standards
- Illinois Senate Bill 7 to Improve Teacher Quality
- Illinois Longitudinal Data System
- Illinois House Bill 605, requiring new pertinent and accessible state school report cards
- Reauthorization and Waiver from NCLB (i.e. the Elementary and Secondary Education Act)



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12



Building the Agenda: Critical Issues and Policy Directions

Current education outcomes for Latinos are grim, particularly in terms of their school dropout rates. As illustrated in Figure 11, the Illinois Latino dropout rate is 43 percent, just below the national rate for Latino dropouts at 45 percent.¹² In response, a number of initiatives have been launched targeting Latino high school students in an effort to nurture their postsecondary success. Intervention in high school, however, can often be too late. Research suggests that indicators predictive of high school dropout can be identified as early as third grade: feelings of low scholastic self-esteem, poverty, low reading skills, and truancy. Academic failure in early grades can have a devastating impact on students.¹³

Recent research by Donald J. Hernandez (2011) of City University of New York makes a compelling case that the “double jeopardy” of low third grade reading levels and living in poverty are powerful predictors of high school dropouts. For students of color, the results are even more severe: African American and Latino students who did not exhibit proficient reading levels in third grade were less likely to graduate from high school than their White counterparts. Scholastic interventions for any disadvantaged student—particularly those focused on early academic literacy and language development—cannot wait until high school.¹⁴

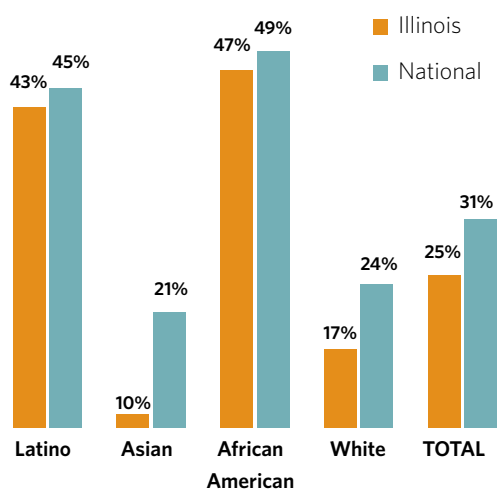
Birth to age five are among the most important years in influencing a child’s foundation for learning and academic success. This fact renders investments in high quality early education a cost-effective strategy. For our nation’s Latino children, the consequences of the early education gap are almost immediate. By age two, many demonstrate limited vocabulary, and by preschool, they tend to have lower average scores in language and math when compared with non-Latino children.¹⁵

Research contends, nevertheless, that the positive outcomes of quality Pre-K programs do not always continue during and after transition to grade school. This downward trend is far from inevitable. Studies also illustrate that the benefits of children’s early education can continue uninterrupted if and when Pre-K programming is linked with the elementary grades—this would include a shared structure and an articulated set of scholastic and social objectives.¹⁶

While all students would benefit from the integrated Pre-K to third grade approach, special considerations for Latino students remain necessary. The following key issue areas are explored and include their specific impact on Latino students:

- Raising Academic and Instructional Standards
- Preparing Teachers and Academic Leadership
- Addressing Funding and Facility Concerns
- Fostering Partners in Education

Figure 11. Illinois and National High School Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2007



Source: Alliance for Excellent Education. (2010). *Illinois high schools data for class of 2007*. Retrieved May 25, 2012, from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Illinois.pdf>.



Photo © Olga Lopez

Raising Academic and Instructional Standards

Improving instruction must take into account factors associated with early tracking and expectations for achievement, assessments, and complexities of language development.

Early Tracking and Low Academic Expectations

Latino children, particularly those from non-English-speaking homes, frequently find themselves grouped into lower-level curriculum tracks.¹⁷ These tracks tend to cover less challenging academic experiences and, as a result, leave them disadvantaged because of missed opportunities. On the other hand, children whose parents have had postsecondary educational opportunities may be guided into curriculum tracks that better prepare them for higher education. If, during initial school enrollment, Latinos are set apart, they may come to see themselves as comparatively below other groups and may demonstrate lower expectations for their own academic success.

Early tracking leads to inequities in two ways. The first is through separate instructional offerings within the same school. This explains why high-achieving schools may still exhibit low educational outcomes from their Latino population. The second involves Latinos who attend schools where they may find themselves geographically segregated and isolated. “Schools in more affluent neighborhoods, and that serve more socioeconomically advantaged students, have been shown to provide more rigorous college preparatory and honors courses than schools in lower-income communities that largely serve populations of underrepresented students.”¹⁸ While these findings were primarily about California schools, they are applicable to other geographic regions as well. In addition, Latinos, who have less access to preschool, are more likely to be less well-trained in their early learning years, exacerbating their likelihood of meeting the demands of a college prep curriculum.

Education policy makers have begun to attend to such vast gaps in academic achievement. The development of the Common Core State Standards (see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12 for a description of these standards) is a recent policy initiative intended to provide agreed-upon goals for student success.

If implemented successfully, these standardized achievement levels are expected to benefit students of color and those who come from low-income families.¹⁹

Rethinking Assessments in an Era of High-Stakes Accountability

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), large scale standardized testing has been given high priority in U.S. education. The academic accountability measures have tended to considerably confine the focus of education in recent years. As a consequence, many teachers feel required to teach to tests. Test outcomes can present punitive implications: limited access to special and college preparatory programs; lower rates of student graduation; stalled grade advancement; low teacher ranking and/or merit salary increases; school sanctions, closures or reorganizations; and diminished district financing.²⁰

Assessments, nevertheless, are important tools for tracking student development and, when they are aligned with high learning standards, can present important benefits. In addition, when accompanied by data from the Illinois Longitudinal Data System, they could help identify best practices to support student achievement and monitor programs.

The accuracy of publicly reported education statistics, however, has been questioned.²¹ Large scale standardized tests in English are especially problematic for ELLs. Researchers point out that these tests, meant to assess content knowledge (e.g. of science or mathematical concepts), are invalid because ELLs are required to take them before their English skills are developed enough to understand the test questions. Timed assessments put ELLs at a particularly significant disadvantage, given the need for the *double-processing* of questions, or the translation from English into their native language. As a result, many ELLs are classified within “below” or “warning” categories due to the limited time they are given to read long passages and answer questions, versus an accurate account of their content knowledge. Assessments conducted in their native language, in turn, can provide a more precise account of student

performance.²² Alternative approaches also include the provision of accommodations, such as increased testing time or permitting students to answer in their first language.

Critical contextual factors that drive student outcomes are often not measured. Assessments complemented by a broader program or school evaluation can account for factors that are known to hamper Latino student performance: school safety, budgetary limitations, overcrowded facilities, excessive staff turnover, inadequate teacher preparation, and remedial program tracks.²³

Finland, as a formidable example, has recently received high international praise for its educational achievement levels and narrow achievement gaps between its highest- and lowest-performing schools (see Figure 12). Of the many lessons that can be learned from the Finnish system—from unique teacher preparation and excellent professional development to personalized student instruction and social welfare supports—perhaps the most important is their philosophy to “Test Less, Learn More”.

Pasi Sahlberg (2011), Director General of CIMO (Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation) at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture critiques educational reform initiatives that embrace high-stakes testing and consequential penalties on teachers whose students perform at low levels:

“Evidence suggests that teachers tend to redesign their teaching according to these tests, give higher priority to those subjects that are tested, and adjust teaching methods to drilling and memorizing information rather than understanding knowledge. Since there are no standardized high stakes tests in Finland prior to the matriculation examination at the end of the upper secondary education, the teacher can focus on teaching and learning without the disturbance of frequent tests to be passed.”²⁴

The Illinois State Board of Education has applied for a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards (see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12). This will allow the state to

develop its own accountability system of achievement benchmarks within federal guidelines. As educational expert Frances Contreras contends, “While it is undoubtedly important to assess what and how well students are learning in schools, it is equally important to consider how these assessments and accountability mechanisms are being utilized and where the onus for the ‘achievement gap’ is being placed.” Currently the burden of achievement is mainly focused on students and teachers which marginalizes emphasis on how broader systemic supports might also facilitate scholastic success.²⁷ In an era of education reform when student performance is tied to teacher evaluations and assessments stemming from the Common Core Standards are being considered, research and policy discussions regarding appropriate assessment tools—and what this means for Latino students in particular—is more important than ever before.

In general, assessments are important for tracking what and how students are learning. Assessments, nevertheless, need to also account for the contextual factors that influence scholastic achievement (i.e. school safety, funding concerns, ill-equipped teachers, etc.). Content assessments must also be culturally and linguistically relevant, taking into account degrees of linguistic development.

Language Instruction Considerations

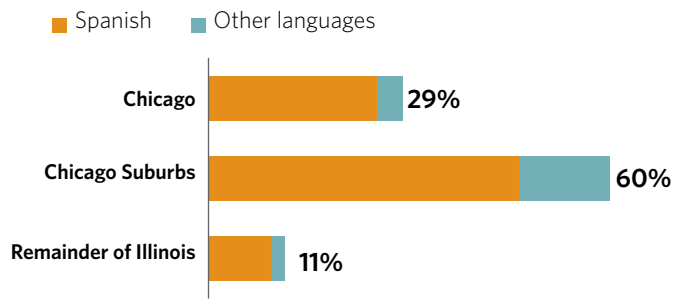
English acquisition is a challenge for some Latino students. It is not, however, the central educational challenge for most. The majority of Illinois Latino students, 67 percent, are not English Language Learners (ELLs). Only nine percent of students in Illinois are classified as ELLs—29 percent within Chicago Public Schools; the majority (60 percent) within the surrounding suburbs; and 11 percent throughout the remainder of the state, as seen in Figure 13. The great majority of ELLs—81 percent—are Spanish-speaking.²⁸ Despite these statistics, their limited English proficiency is often perceived as the main culprit for low educational outcomes. Mastery of the English language, however, is a much more complex process.

Figure 12. A Look at Finnish Schools

Student assessments remain a high priority in Finland. In fact, the country upholds a three-pronged approach:

- 1 Classroom assessment conducted by teachers:** a combination of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments.²⁵ Teachers, in turn, are provided with ample out-of-classroom time to conduct assessments.
- 2 Comprehensive student report card provided each semester:** this evaluation tool reflects performance in both scholastic and non-scholastic areas (including personal conduct). In contrast to a standardized top-down approach focused on limited subjects, schools are provided with the local autonomy to determine their own criteria for the report cards.
- 3 Sample-based external testing:** a cluster of students are selected from specific age cohorts and assessed in reading, math, and science, among other subjects, on a three-to-four-year cyclical basis (versus having the entire student body repeatedly assessed).²⁶

Figure 13. Illinois ELLs by Region, 2010



Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *Bilingual education programs and English language learners in Illinois SY 2010 statistical report*. "Chicago suburbs" includes the collar counties of Cook, Kane, Lake, Dupage, and Will.

There is a great need to expand the concept of English proficiency. Currently, language assessments of Latino students are largely problematic. As education experts explain, students tend to be categorized in an exceedingly one-dimensional dichotomy: as having fluency in English or as English Language Learners. The English proficiency of many Latino students, nevertheless, falls within a more complex range:

- English as the first or primary language with limited exposure to Spanish language
- Interaction with Spanish in the home or community
- Conversant in low levels of English and residing in a largely linguistically isolated area
- Residing within a primarily Spanish-speaking locale

Language development is further complicated by parental education levels and levels of familial acculturation.

All teachers need to be trained on the complexity of language development and how to provide instruction accordingly. Many students not classified as ELLs are still likely to need some kind of support or

intervention. "If children are not exposed to the English of the classroom—the vocabulary and rhetorical style that make up academic English—they will find it very difficult to decipher academic texts and write persuasive essays."²⁹ According to research on ELLs, the transition from *social* English (taking an estimated one to two years to complete) to *academic* English (requiring four to nine years) is a need for many students, not just Latinos (see Figure 14).³⁰

In Maryland, the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has developed a system that has received national attention for raising the academic outcomes of all its students, including ELLs. ELL students within MCPS represent a full range of language abilities—from limited exposure to English to near fluency. Almost 90 percent of the district's third graders are proficient in reading; this includes close to three-fourths of students receiving ELL services. Even more striking, since 2003, MCPS has lessened the reading gap between ELLs and all of the district's third graders by 36 percentage points. The impressive academic achievement of MCPS students continues into college: 86 percent enroll in postsecondary education, including almost 80 percent of African American students and more than 75 percent of Latino students. A key component of MCPS's comprehensive strategy includes widening who is included and supported within ELL services.

ELLs in general tend to be defined as students who do not comprehend sufficient English to learn without assistance in mainstream classrooms. MCPS, in turn, applies a broader definition: "all students whose first language is not English. This group includes students receiving formal language acquisition services, as well as those who have exited services or scored too high on the state English language proficiency placement assessment to qualify for formal services."³¹ Designated categories include:

- **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** students who qualify for formal language services.
- **Reclassified ELLs (R-ELL)** students who have formally exited language services.

Figure 14. Comparing Social and Academic Language

SOCIAL LANGUAGE*	ACADEMIC LANGUAGE*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is used for everyday social conversations ▪ Is easily understood and spoken ▪ Is assisted by facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, context, pictures acquired at home ▪ Is made up of high frequency, monosyllabic, familiar words ▪ Is made up of mostly Anglo-Saxon words ▪ Has short simple sentence structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is used for learning school subjects ▪ Is more abstract and complex ▪ Is cognitively demanding ▪ Is used by teachers, textbooks, literary works ▪ Is learned at school ▪ Is made up of low frequency, multisyllabic, and specialized words ▪ Has complex sentence structures, such as passive voice and embedded clauses

* Soltero, S. (2011). *Schoolwide approaches to educating ELLs: Creating linguistically and culturally responsive K-12 schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- **Non-Limited English Proficient (non-LEP)** though still considered ELLs, they never received formal language services or they exited services more than two years prior. While these students do not receive language services, they still have English acquisition needs, particularly with their academic-level English.

The district approach also provides other systemic supports. They supplement the yearly state-required ELL assessment with their own standards-based formative assessments aligned to the ELL curriculum. Additionally, they provide various individualized instructional ELL programming. Professional development about how to work with ELLs is offered to all district teachers, not just ELL educators, and special supports to ELL families are available.³²

Illinois English language proficiency testing is structured in a way that has caused many ELL students to be transitioned out of language services at a rapid pace. According to 2010 data from the Illinois State Board of Education, as many as 28 percent of ELL students were transitioned out of language programming within less than one year. Another 34 percent were transitioned out within one to three years.³³ This entails more than half of ELL students moving out of language services after only three years. Although categorized as having “attained proficiency in English,” such students likely do not have the necessary academic English to succeed scholastically. The quick transitions are likely contributing to the current achievement gap as well.

In an attempt to address language needs, in 2010, Chicago Public Schools promoted a comprehensive approach to language education through its commissioned report, *Language Education: Preparing Chicago Public School Students for a Global Community*.³⁴ Multiple language acquisition is conceptualized as a critical step toward enhancing the scholastic success of all students.

Bilingual—even multilingual—acquisition by all students is increasingly in demand in today’s global economy. Beyond the obvious economic benefits, language skills provide important cognitive, academic, and social advantages. The approach is inclusive of all student needs and encompasses three domains:

- **Academic Language** includes the ability to read, write, and hold considerable discussion about math, science, history, and other disciplines.
- **World Language Education** promotes the acquisition of a second or third language along with developing an awareness of other countries and cultures to amplify student comprehension of global social, political, and economic budget matters.
- **Additive Bilingual Education for ELLs** (including dual-language instruction)—endorses instructional models that add English while simultaneously cultivating a student’s native language. This contradicts traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) programming, where students are encouraged to transition from their native lan-

guage to English, often losing their bilingual capabilities (i.e. subtractive approach).³⁵

The report also called for the Chicago Public Schools to intentionally include ELLs and all language learners in program and planning at the school and district levels. This was a vital step towards ushering more attention towards educating ELLs and valuing the linguistic development of all students.

As the Common Core standards are implemented, all students benefit from vigorous linguistic and cultural learning. This includes recognition of and valuing the linguistic and cultural assets all students bring to the classroom along with awareness for how they profit from being multilingual, multiliterate, and multicultural.

Policy Directions

The Latino Policy Forum supports policies that promote high academic and instructional standards for Latino students that:

- ▶ Advocate for culturally and linguistically relevant academic content assessments, taking into account degrees of linguistic development.
- ▶ Expect a diversity of assessments and appropriate teacher preparation and professional development to use them.
- ▶ Expect that more Latino students complete college preparatory coursework and address their overrepresentation in remedial-level tracks.
- ▶ Require research-based instruction, curriculum, and teacher preparation that aligns across classrooms, schools, and districts (birth-to-three, ECE, and K-12 settings).
- ▶ Encourage availability of appropriate resources to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, data collection and analysis, time for teacher collaboration, appropriately trained counselors, after school tutoring and enrichment programs, and others).
- ▶ Advocate for access to quality curriculum, academic standards, and adequate student and family counseling services that foster college preparation and/or postsecondary success.
- ▶ Expect multilingual education as a central strategy for academic achievement (i.e. world language and culture, social and academic language, dual language programming, heritage language education, and others).


 For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12



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Preparing Teachers and Academic Leadership

The cornerstone of teacher effectiveness is how well they are prepared to teach and, the Forum would add, how deeply they understand the cultures of the children in their classrooms. Equally important, principals and educational leadership must be adequately prepared to meet the needs of a changing student demographic.

For the growing Illinois Latino student population, this would include appropriate preparation and professional development to enhance educators' ability to understand and work with students of various cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Challenges, associated with limited understanding about their backgrounds along with engaging families who have limited English language skills, could be overcome by increasing the number of well-prepared linguistically and culturally competent educators. According to Sonia Soltero:

"The makeup of students in Pre-K through 12 classrooms across the United States has become increasingly more diverse, and teachers are now much more likely to have linguistically diverse children in their classrooms, even in schools with traditionally White, middle-class, and English-speaking families. At the university where I teach in Chicago, for example, a significant number of students enrolled in teacher certification programs will end up in suburban schools that, unlike 15 years ago, now have ELLs. Except for students enrolled in our Bilingual-Bicultural Education Program, these teacher candidates have limited knowledge and understanding of a population of children that they will very likely have in their classrooms and schools."³⁶

An innovative early childhood teacher preparation program at DePaul University mandates that every undergraduate student take all the courses for the ESL and bilingual endorsement. The program-

ming offers a critical step towards preparing aspiring educators for the increasing Latino and ELL student population.

Considerable effort has been directed in Illinois toward developing more effective teacher evaluation and preparation standards (see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12). In an attempt to overcome achievement gaps, concerted efforts to attract effective teachers to disadvantaged schools are a central priority in many education reform circles. Training often does not match the skills needed for classroom instruction or the cultural and linguistic needs of the students. Additionally, there are breakdowns in systems when students move to ensure their records are passed on to new teachers. Teachers also report that they need more time to collaborate with colleagues to analyze student data, align lesson plans, and fortify teaching strategies.³⁷

All students—including Latinos—are in critical need of well-trained, experienced instructors. Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009) in their book primarily based on the Latino student issues in California, *The Latino Education Crisis, The Consequences of Failed Social Policies*, articulated the following:

- Latinos in general, and those with limited English language skills, are more likely than middle-income students to have teachers with less professional training and experience and who are particularly ill-equipped for understanding the complicated nuances of language instruction. This is compounded by the fact that Latinos are more likely than their middle-class counterparts to attend segregated schools with poorer facilities and safety issues.

- Minority students are less likely to have the necessary books and materials to succeed. In addition, many are often placed further behind through assessments and tests meant for English speakers that, in effect, misrepresent or neglect to reflect their actual knowledge in academic content. They are often further challenged by missed school days while administrators struggle to correctly assess and place them.
- In schools that lack the workforce and resources for adequate dual language/bilingual learning, students with limited academic English can lose valuable instructional time. The lack of bilingual instructors also makes it difficult to build on the academic content students might know in their native language.
- Latino students and their families may more easily relate to teachers who share their language.

While these findings were primarily about Latinos in California schools, they are applicable to other school districts with high Latino populations.

Increasing the number of well-prepared bilingual and bicultural educators is a multipronged approach. Steps towards securing this goal often aim to ensure that more teachers acquire the bilingual endorsement on top of a teaching certificate. Most frequently, teachers obtain the bilingual endorsement in order to become teachers in bilingual classrooms. Largely marginalized, however, is that mainstream teachers are unable to fully access their Latino students' learning potential. In other words, these teachers are often unaware of how to support the learning and development of bicultural/bilingual students. This implies that, instead of a bilingual endorsement add-on to a teacher preparation program, each teacher preparation program itself (early childhood, elementary, middle school, secondary, special education, etc.) would prepare its candidates to be competent in supporting the language development of children whose first language is not English.

Effective School Leadership

Strong school leaders are vital to guiding academic success. They can attract and support enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, foster an aligned curriculum and instructional efforts, discern how to effectively engage parents and the wider community, and judiciously utilize resources.

While Illinois legislation aimed at enhancing principal preparation and certification requirements is promising, special consideration for recruiting and retaining quality leadership in schools with high Latino populations remains necessary. Research indicates a strong correlation between the extent of superintendent tenure, consistency of leadership, and student performance. Latinos who are more likely to reside in low-income neighborhoods may also be more likely to attend schools with higher levels of both teacher and administrator turnover. Schools with limited resources struggle to

attract strong leaders who stay. While not always the case, effective administrators can be attracted by an affluent district's ability to offer attractive salary and benefits packages, better working facilities, ample professional development options, and larger budgets.³⁸

In addition, some researchers suggest that teachers and administrators should have an in-depth understanding of their students and the wider community in order to be more effective. These leaders would then benefit from first-hand knowledge of both the difficulties and the assets in the broader environment.³⁹

As of 2011, Latino children comprised nearly one-quarter of Illinois students, while a mere five percent of state teachers and administrators identified themselves as Latino.⁴⁰ This factor sheds light on the need for more diversification within the educator workforce. Currently community advocates and teaching institutions are devising creative avenues to meet the rising demand for more minority teachers.

Policy Directions

The Latino Policy Forum supports policies that aim to promote quality preparation and continuous professional development programs for educators to work with the growing Latino student population. Such programs:

- ▶ Promote cultural, racial, and linguistic competencies among educators and administrators.
- ▶ Expect that appropriate resources are available to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, support and mentorship, data collection and analysis, time for teacher collaboration, and others).
- ▶ Promote Latino and low-income student access to highly qualified teachers.
- ▶ Encourage racial and cultural diversity within the educator and leadership workforce (i.e. teachers, administrators, board members, elected officials, paraprofessionals, etc.).
- ▶ Foster appropriate certifications, endorsements, field practicum, and postsecondary course offerings for both mainstream teachers and those specifically in bilingual classrooms.



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12



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Addressing Funding and Facility Concerns

Low-income students and students of color often receive less of the necessary resources to excel academically. Latinos (46 percent) and Blacks (44 percent) are more likely to attend schools in high poverty urban areas compared to just ten percent of Whites. These students, as is the case in Illinois, receive up to \$2,286 less than those in low-poverty districts. This results in a \$1,595 funding gap between high and low-minority school districts.⁴¹

“Local control of school finance has been an emblem of American education for a very long time and is a deeply ingrained feature of our system. In essence, in many states, groups of citizens have been allowed to gather together to form their own education taxing districts. The result is that wealthy parents, by forming their own taxing districts, can drive their tax rates very low while benefitting from very high tax yields. At the other end of the spectrum, people who cannot afford very much for housing end up congregated together in districts where they must tax themselves at very high rates to produce a very low yield.”⁴²

The overreliance on Illinois property taxes for school funding creates a tax rate inequity resulting in a funding gap for schools: many poor communities have to tax at a higher rate than rich communities to yield similar funds. Since many tend to reside in poorer communities, their families tend to face higher tax rates.

Reaching adequate per-pupil expenditures from the state is a constant challenge as well. The Illinois General Assembly endorsed \$6,119 and the Illinois State Board of Education approved \$6,416 in FY 2012. The amounts were far from the recommendation of the Illinois Education Funding Advisory Board (EFAB) of \$8,360 per

pupil.⁴³ While a laudable effort to battle the state’s vast funding inequities, EFAB’s suggested funding amount is confronted by the realities of a struggling economy.⁴⁴

A key contributor to the state’s inequality also stems from the limited amount of resources it allocates towards education. In FY 2009, close to 28 percent of Illinois’ revenue for public education came from the state (60.5 percent from local and 11.9% from federal sources). This ranks Illinois as 50th—the state with the lowest percentage of its revenue for public education coming from the state.⁴⁵

Equitable learning conditions are necessary to ensure the post-secondary success of all students. Inequitable resource allocation influences staffing, facility conditions, overcrowding, access to quality textbooks and equipment, and the availability and use of demanding academic coursework. A central limitation to current school financing formulas is the substantial dependence on local property taxes which limits under-resourced schools.⁴⁶

Overcrowded schools are of particular concern for the growing Illinois Latino student population. They have come to comprise nearly 1-in-4 students in the state and their presence will only continue to increase (representing 1-in-4 children under the age of five).⁴⁷ The demographic trend calls for the building of facilities to accommodate this growth, beginning with planning and mapping.

Not only do challenging school conditions inhibit learning, but they can lead to teacher turnover. Inadequate funding influences teacher/student ratios, counselor/student ratios, and class sizes. Many

researchers have found that working conditions often influence job choice.

Lack of funding also exacerbates the growing *digital divide* between the haves and have nots. Up-to-date computers, internet, software, and the maintenance of such equipment are increasingly important in an information-driven economy. Access to technology is correlated to race and income, with middle-class Whites tending to benefit more from better resources.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, closing gaps in school funding would reduce high-poverty, high-minority districts' inability to compete for high-quality teachers, provide academic support, and facilitate enrichment programs for their students.

State- and district-level budgetary deficits and chronically low student performance have resulted in contentious school turnarounds, closings, and relocations, particularly in low-income minority areas. Along with Illinois, the budgetary crisis of many states in the country has been coupled with the increased role of the federal government in education reform. The Obama administration's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, even if only momentarily, has meant the federal government has considerable influence in both funding and policy changes at the state level. In particular, the U.S. Department of Education has aimed to restructure chroni-

cally low performing schools with more than \$5 billion investment (this includes Race to the Top funds, School Improvement Grants, and Investing in Innovation Fund) aimed at four specific turnaround models (Figure 15).⁴⁹

Turnaround efforts engender much public debate and research in this area is nascent. Given how quickly turnaround decisions and practices are evolving, an organized Latino community could provide a critical voice in public discussions including: how and why certain strategies are or are not successful, how to build capacity within schools in a way that sustains improvement into the future, and how to mobilize parents and larger community involvement within various strategies.⁵⁰

Policy Directions

The Latino Policy Forum supports policies that aim to ensure that education funding and facilities meet the needs of all Latino children. The goals are to:

- ▶ Advocate for increased state aid, including an increased poverty allocation.⁵¹
- ▶ Advocate for appropriate per-pupil funding.
- ▶ Advocate for facilities that are safe and well-equipped.
- ▶ Promote access to relevant and up-to-date technology.
- ▶ Promote that existing facilities and school buildings accommodate Latino population growth.
- ▶ Encourage equitable strategies that apply to various geographic regions (i.e. urban, suburban, and rural).
- ▶ Promote appropriate taxation and funding distribution strategies.
- ▶ Advocate for inclusion of the Latino community in public discussions of school closings, turnarounds, and relocations.

Figure 15. The Four Turnaround Models

- **Turnarounds.** Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars, schedules and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach that substantially improves student outcomes.
- **Restarts.** Transfer control of, or close and reopen a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School Closures.** Close the school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within the Local Education Agency.
- **Transformations.** Replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at

www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12

*Jeff Kutash, Eva Nico, Emily Gorin, Samira Rahmatullah, and Kate Tallant (2010). "The School Turnaround Field Guide." Available at: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/The-School-Turnaround-Field-Guide.pdf>



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Fostering Partners in Education

Involved communities—from cradle to career—are critical for supporting academic achievement and labor market success. Research shows that a child’s early years are a vital time for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. Schools, especially those with high Latino populations, benefit from tapping into community resources—families, care-givers, community-based organizations, local businesses, foundations, faith-based organizations—that can all work to facilitate student learning.

Families, in particular, equipped with the knowledge to promote child enrichment activities can foster vocabulary development, academic performance, and an overall curiosity for learning.⁵² Quality parent and familial programming have also been shown to improve children’s perceptions about school, increase attendance, and decrease dropout rates.⁵³

Promoting parental and wider community involvement provides benefits to society at large. A robust array of evidence shows that a stimulating home environment provides important long-term benefits for children and the wider public. This has been evidenced in the areas of enhanced academic success and health outcomes, along with a reduced need for special education, social services, and the criminal justice system. Educators and schools benefit from family engagement programs that promote teaching within the home and stimulate early literacy and future collaborations. They can also develop parent leadership capacities to launch involvement in school governance.⁵⁴

Successful family and community engagement initiatives are necessary throughout a child’s educational experience. This long-term approach enhances parental self-confidence, strengthens school-home relations, improves school attendance and attitude toward

learning, encourages adult involvement in meeting educational needs, and, ultimately, nurtures the desire to pursue higher education.

Current evidence contends, however, that early childhood and the shift into formal school are times of possible risk for young Latino children.⁵⁵ The integration of families into the learning process, particularly through culturally and linguistically relevant programs, is vital to promote school readiness and academic achievement.

It is also valuable to learn from parents how they want to be involved in their children’s education. Such inquiry, for example, might find that parents highly value learning more about the benefits of preschools and how to access them. In turn, they may request more information about the pros and cons of different school options and how they might access them. In general, it is vital to support parents in becoming critical consumers within their children’s educational trajectory. This avenue could also include a discovery for what the educational needs of the parents themselves might be (e.g. learning English, going back to school, accessing educational resources, etc.). All in all, including parents and families in the development of community programming allows providers to tap into the immense cultural strengths of the Latino community.

Nevertheless, a number of obstacles can prevent Latino parents from fully engaging in the process. These include language, cultural differences, low incomes, limited formal education, a stressful home life, immigration status, frequent mobility, employment schedules, and lack of accessible programming.

Latino Families and Immigration Status

Recent demographic trends clash with common perceptions that

most Latinos are immigrants and that most immigrants are undocumented. Illinois estimates indicate that close to 60 percent of Latino adults and more than 90 percent of their children are U.S. citizens.⁵⁶ Although less so today, immigration has long served as the fundamental contributor to the growth of the Latino community and indeed remains an important issue.

Immigration status and the broader political climate, however, have a great impact on the Latino community. Of the 11 million of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., 58 percent (6.5 million) come from Mexico and 23 percent (2.6 million) come from other Latin American countries.⁵⁷ Many families have mixed legal status. Among children of undocumented parents, 4.5 million were born in the U.S. and one million were not. Among children who have at least one undocumented parent, 70 percent have parents from Mexico and 17 percent from other Latin American countries. In Illinois, there are an estimated 525,000 undocumented immigrants representing four percent of the country's undocumented population.⁵⁸

Growing research finds that parent immigration status can affect children, even if the children have citizenship. When compared with those whose parents are legal residents or native born, many demonstrate lower levels of language and cognitive development by the age of two. The threat of deportation or lack of knowledge about social service eligibility often inhibits undocumented parents from looking for help from government services. Such fears are only exacerbated by challenging immigration policies and recent hikes in deportations. Undocumented parents are likely to experience less-developed social network support; their children are often negatively affected by their long work hours, low pay, and poor living conditions.⁵⁹

Cultural differences can also influence parental involvement. Some Latino parents might view schools as authoritative institutions not to be questioned and be intimidated away from advocating for their children's scholastic needs. School authorities, in turn, can misinterpret this as a lack of interest in education.⁶⁰ Outreach to Latinos is likely to require materials, employees, and communication that are culturally sensitive and conducted in Spanish. Without these essential components, parents can lack the appropriate information about available services and programming in the community and their right to such services.

Building on Latino Cultural Strengths

Families offer cultural strengths that well-designed programming can enhance. Recent research indicates Latinos exhibit strong parenting practices that can have positive effects on children's early cognitive and social development. The work contends that traditional customs—duty to family, respect for authorities, home language and culture—can safeguard children from peer pressures. Enhanced social competence is critical for school adjustment and educational success.⁶¹ This innovative research, while still in its early stages, implies that the positive cultural features Latinos offer

their children can be potentially expanded upon through informed parent engagement programs.

Creating Partners in Education in the Suburbs

While the state's Latinos have traditionally lived in the City of Chicago, virtually all of their growth over the past decade has been concentrated in Chicago suburbs—often lacking linguistically and culturally relevant infrastructure. In 2010, 37 percent of Illinois Latinos were enrolled in Chicago Public Schools with nearly two-thirds in the suburbs and downstate.⁶² In addition, concentrations of poverty are increasingly growing within suburbs. Between 2000 and 2008, suburban counties faced more than a 40 percent increase in residents living in poverty. Suburbs are often challenged by fewer community-based organizations than their urban counterparts and have to extend their services across more expansive municipalities. The lack of suburban providers has intensified with the recent economic recession and subsequent funding cuts.⁶³

Policy Directions

The Latino Policy Forum supports policies that aim to promote high quality continuous partnerships that foster Latino student achievement to:

- ▶ Advance the participation of many partners (i.e. families, community-based organizations, foundations, local businesses, faith-based organizations, school-based health organizations, others) at the district, school, and classroom levels.
- ▶ Promote opportunities for parent education, participation, personal development, and empowerment.
- ▶ Foster a college-going culture among Latinos by fostering the inclusion of college and university collaborations at all levels of education.
- ▶ Advocate for and with community partners to meet a broader set of student needs (public and mental health, Dream Act, teen parenting, gang prevention, peer pressures, others).
- ▶ Advocate for quality mentoring and internship programs.
- ▶ Expect that appropriate resources are available to meet this strategy (i.e. funding, support and mentorship, research and analysis on effective strategies, appropriately trained school counselors, assistance with navigating higher education and financial aid, and others).



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12



Conclusion

In light of the concepts for change outlined in this report, the Latino Policy Forum aims to initiate the K-12 education agenda with the following next steps:

- Become a dependable and consistent source for all stakeholders in Illinois regarding Latino educational concerns through the provision of reports, data analyses, white papers, commentary, media stories, and editorials.
- Produce comprehensive publications and strategic reports with relevant data on Latinos in education beginning with the *K-12 Strategic Study* report.
- Foster collaborations with educators, school leadership, elected officials, parents, and community stakeholders to influence policy process.
- Establish the Forum's Education *Acuerdo* to build the policy making and advocacy capacity of Latino organizations and leaders in Illinois. The *Acuerdo* will make sure that information, policy, and advocacy on education-specific issues represent the Latino perspective and its community needs.
- Work with *Acuerdo* to identify and advocate for specific policy initiatives based on the policy directions of this report. This entails integrating the concerns raised in this report into Illinois' ongoing reform efforts.

The current information-driven economy calls for a highly trained and educated workforce. This bold task begins with the Latino Policy Forum's call to action for a collective and comprehensive Latino-focused K-12 education agenda. This report provides background demographic and other information regarding Latino educational achievement in Illinois; identifies key education policy issues and explores the impact of these issues on Latino students in K-12; offers policy and practice directions for change; and concludes with action steps for advancing the Forum's K-12 agenda. The future economic viability of Illinois is tied to its ability to harness the cultural and linguistic assets of its growing Latino community and to improve its educational outcomes. Beyond the need for economic prosperity, education in general provides critical benefits to individual development and society overall.



For a literature review and list of related research, see online appendices at

www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12

Endnotes

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Online Appendices

The Latino Policy Forum has dedicated a webpage to appendices and resources related to this report.

Visit www.latinopolicyforum.org/k12 for supporting information, including:

- Appendix 1: Illinois Education Reform Context
- Appendix 2: Agendas from K-12 Advisory Committee Meetings and Latino Education Summit
- Appendix 3: Latino Policy Forum K-12 Demographic Overview
- Appendix 4: Summary of Advisory Board and Summit Speaker Presentations
- Appendix 5: Presentation by Robin Steans, Executive Director, Advance Illinois: “Education Policy Reform in Illinois.”
- Appendix 6: Presentation by Dr. Donald Hernandez, Hunter College & City University of New York: “Third Grade Reading, High School Graduation, and the PreK-3rd Policy Agenda.”
- Appendix 7: Presentation by Dr. Karen Woodson, Montgomery County Public Schools: “Responding to the Changing Needs of English Language Learners.”
- Appendix 8: Presentation by Dr. Elaine Allensworth, The Consortium on Chicago School Research: “Latino Students in Chicago Public Schools.”
- Appendix 9: Presentation by Dr. Frances Contreras, University of Washington: “Examining Equity, Access & Progress among Latino & Underrepresented Students in the U.S.”



For a literature review and list of related research,
see online appendices at
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