



ISSUES BRIEF 2009

PRE K-12 EDUCATION

Investing in education to close achievement disparities

The Chicano Latino Affairs Council recommends that the Minnesota Governor and Legislature:

- Preserve funds for Early Childhood Education with a focus on families and children facing economic and social disadvantage.
- Support a mandatory Academic Achievement Plan for school districts to eliminate disparities in academic performance.
- Reconsider the proposals included in the 2008 Omnibus Education Policy Bill that added new standards to help reduce the achievement gap.
- Look at best practices and benchmarks that support parental and community involvement and encourage student engagement and academic success.
- Support the recruitment of certified bilingual/bicultural teachers in school districts that face growing and diverse student enrollments.
- Continue supporting English language programs.

Background:

Today in Minnesota, there are over 50,721 Latino students in public schools statewide. During the 2004-2008 period, Latino student K-12 enrollment grew by almost 24 percent, while the white student enrollment declined 3.8 percent. Additionally, the number of school districts with 10 percent or more Latino student enrollment rose from 29 districts in 2003 to 39 districts in 2007. Demographic estimates point out that the Latino community continues to be the fastest growing minority, both in the nation and in the state. In 2007-2008, five rural districts exceeded 30% of Latino enrollees: St. James (37.5%), Worthington (37%), Lynd (35%), Sleepy Eye (35%), and Madelia (33%). Some rural districts like Worthington as well as more suburban districts like Richfield have seen significant enrollments not only of Hispanic/Latino students but students of color in general, outnumbering white students.

However, it is well documented that, despite overall improvement on standardized tests over the last years, educational disparities, understood as observed differences in educational opportunities and outcomes among two or more groups, persists and Latino students are not meeting standards in math, reading and writing at the same rates than their peers. Neither are they graduating at the same rate than their white, Asian, and African-American peers. Based on 2008 MCA tests, both in math and reading, the achievement gap continues to be significant between Latino and white students in each grade the test is taken. The gap begins in 3d grade at 21 and 33 percent proficiency difference in math and reading respectively, and continues to widen throughout grade school. In 2008, the graduation rate for Latinos was 42 percent, well below the 78 percent graduation rate for students statewide, and 83 percent for white students.

But contrary to assumptions that Latinos do not value education as much as other ethnic groups, residents in the communities visited by CLAC in the summer of 2007 explained that Latino parents want to see their children succeed in school. However, as recent reports indicate, there are multiple factors behind the gap that hinder student involvement or engagement in education, and thus compromise academic achievement. In 2006, a report by José Rosario, professor of education at Indiana University, explained that some of these factors are the institutional and cultural barriers experienced by students at school; low levels of parental

education, and low support from parents, teachers, and the community. There is also the subjection of Latinos to low expectations, discriminatory practices, and the perception that Latinos are not destined to higher education. These factors, along with other specific internal and external conditions (mobility, lack of educational continuity, living conditions that make studying difficult) affect student performance.

Multiple reports in Minnesota and in other states show that early childhood education and parent involvement are vital to secure student success and increase the number of college graduates. It is also well documented that society as a whole benefits from public investment on early childhood education. Research led by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis indicates that there are double-digit returns on the investment in early childhood development. However, according to a recent study by Growth & Justice, fewer than 2 percent of Minnesota 4-year olds were in pre-K programs last year, placing the state 36th in the nation, compared to other Midwest states like Wisconsin and Illinois which rank 7 and 13, respectively.

Latino students' success depends on a variety of strategies that mainly will have to involve school leadership, proper early childhood education programs, a comprehensive school reform, and increasing learning opportunities for students. CLAC has identified best practices that prove to be successful due to the constant leadership and involvement of teachers and school administration to work together and close the achievement gap. For example, Sleepy Eye High School in southern Minnesota has seen a 100 percent Latino graduation rate through successful coaching from 2003 to 2006. Fiscal accountability and the efficient use of state and federal funds, including the *Basic Skills Revenue*, is one tool that school principals have to obtain resources from school districts to implement programs that engage Latino parents, develop educational support activities for graduation, and prevent the Latino dropout rate.

By implementing initiatives within the schools, communities, and Latino families there is an opportunity to significantly close the gap within five years. Several solutions for improving student achievement, including high school graduation and college attendance rates, include: a) secondary school mentor program and efficient use of funding; b) school partnerships; c) school readiness programs, and d) Latino student participation in postsecondary learning opportunities.

Relevant Legislation

In 2008, the Omnibus Education Policy Bill (SF3001, Ch. 310) included a number of high-profile education issues including a new school report card, raising the dropout age to 18 beginning in 2011, requiring physical education for high school graduation, and setting new standards for teacher training in reading. The bill tried to address some of the structural components behind students' success and motivation at school which would have helped mitigate the achievement gap. The bill would have implicated a new assessment indicator called *growth-based value-added* which measures the difference between an established baseline of academic growth and a student's own academic growth over time. It would also have established an advisory task force on improving teacher quality and identifying institutional structures and strategies for integrating secondary and postsecondary academic and career education. The bill failed to become law upon a veto.

Money was allocated in the Supplemental Budget (FY 2009) for an advisory task force that would determine how the educational achievement of low-income students and students of color is positively impacted by rigorous education issues (preparation and coursework, educators' professional development, ELL, special education, the use of valid and reliable data on student preparation for postsecondary academic and career opportunities). However, a provision in the bill indicates that the Department of Education shall not expend any funds for the advisory task force unless a match of an equal amount of non-state funds has been received for this purpose.