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Growing Populations, Growing Challenges

Urban school districts are taking extra steps to improve achievement of Hispanic students

By Del Stover

It would be easy to assume that an urban school system where three out of four students are Hispanic—many living in poverty and speaking primarily Spanish at home—would struggle to show academic gains.

But that's not the case at Arizona's Phoenix Union High School District. In 2004-05, students scored near the state average in reading, writing, and math, and every school in the district met federal annual yearly progress (AYP) goals. Student graduation rates are up, the dropout rate is down, and more students are taking rigorous coursework.

"In a couple of years, we went from lagging 15 to 20 points behind Arizona standards to reducing the academic deficit to [1 to 2] percentage points in math and reading—and surpassing it in writing by 3 percentage points," boasts board member Harry Garewal, who also serves on the CUBE Steering Committee.

The school system still has a ways to go, but its progress is not unique. Any number of urban school districts—Bridgeport, Conn.; Miami-Dade County; and San Antonio, Texas; to name just a few—are showing gains for Hispanic students.

A teacher reads a story to second-graders in a dual language classroom. More school systems across the nation are experiencing a dramatic increase in their Hispanic student populations—and are seeking strategies to improve their academic achievement.

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

This success is reassuring. As everyone knows, a burgeoning Hispanic population is changing the face of America. Today, one in six children in the nation is Hispanic. By 2020, that ratio will be closer to one in four. A sizable percentage of these children will be clustered into poor, urban neighborhoods. As many as half will

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Urban Advocate

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About CUBE

NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the urban initiative of NSBA's National Affiliate program, addresses the programmatic, fiscal, and governance challenges of urban public education on behalf of its 101 member school boards and the almost 8 million students they serve. Through legislative advocacy, conferences, workshops, seminars, and publications, CUBE has been in the forefront of cultivating excellence in urban public schools for more than three decades.

About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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URBAN BRIEFS

Boston searching for Payzant's successor

Thomas W. Payzant, one of the most respected urban superintendents in the nation, retired this summer as head of the Boston Public Schools. At press time, a search committee was looking for his successor.

When Payzant arrived in Boston 11 years ago, by many accounts the school system had lost its direction. His predecessor fought incessantly with both City Hall and the school committee, and little progress had been made in improving student achievement.

Payzant quickly brought order and discipline to the school system and built a strong working relationship with the mayor and school committee. He also spearheaded a host of reform initiatives that ultimately led to rising student test scores.

His efforts, along with the school committee's leadership, earned the district national recognition. Boston won CUBE's 2004 Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence and is a five-time finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education.

When Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the formation of the search committee, school committee Chair Elisabeth Reilinger credited Payzant for helping to turn around the city's schools.

"We are no longer a school system in crisis; today, Boston is recognized as one of the leading large urban public school districts in the country," she said. "Under [Payzant's] leadership, the Boston Public Schools have put into place a sound education reform agenda, and significant gains have been made in improving student achievement."

Before taking the helm in Boston, Payzant, 65, served as an education official in the Clinton Administration and as superintendent in Oklahoma City, San Diego, and Eugene, Ore. He recently announced plans to serve as a part-time senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Miami students top national average in reading

A majority of students in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools scored above the national average on standardized reading tests this year—a first for the giant school system under the state's FCAT program.

Test scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test showed third to 10th-graders surpassing the national median in reading, in some cases by double digits. Math scores rose in six of the seven grades tested.

The biggest gains were seen in the district's middle schools and K-8 centers, according to school officials. But most promising for school officials is that many previously low-performing students made impressive gains on the tests.

Cincinnati reform model strengthens teacher skills

Three Cincinnati schools will participate in a pilot program next year designed to raise student performance by strengthening the instructional practices and professional development of teachers.

The schools will implement the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a research-based model of school reform developed by the Milken Family Foundation, say school officials, who hope to curb the high turnover among new teachers.

The initiative will focus on four components: ongoing professional development, creating new "career paths" for teachers, using data to guide instructional improvements, and offering incentive pay for student achievement or professional growth.

"Research shows that quality teaching is the most important factor in raising student achievement, and this program is designed to enhance teaching by directing instructional resources where they are most needed—in the heart of the classroom," says Superintendent Rosa Blackwell.

Mobile, Ala., foundation wins recognition

The Mobile Area Education Foundation has been selected as one of the top local education funds in the nation by the Public Education Network, a national association of community-based education advocacy organizations.

After reviewing various programs, the network cited the Mobile County, Ala., foundation as particularly successful in

working with school officials and the public, helping them develop a "vision for the education of all children, pressing for school improvement aligned with that vision, and monitoring the system's progress."

Oakland board protests California exit exam

The Oakland, Calif., school board voted 4-2 to defy a state law requiring high school students to pass a state exit exam as a condition of graduation, then saw its decision dismissed by the state-appointed head of the district.

Although the school board was stripped of decision-making authority when the state took over the financially troubled district in 2003, some board members wanted to protest the state's controversial exit exam. An estimated 2 to 5 percent of the state's high school seniors did not receive a diploma this year because they failed the test.

A day after the board's action, the district's state-appointed administrator, Randolph Ward, made clear that he would not grant diplomas to the 140 or so Oakland seniors who failed the test. The students, however, have another chance to pass the exam this summer.

L.A. Unified targets 17 low-performing schools

The Los Angeles Unified School District is looking at a $36 million plan to turn around 17 of its lowest-performing high schools.

The proposal, announced by Superintendent Roy Romer in June, would require targeted schools to implement an achievement plan—and show measurable academic improvements. To do that, officials say, schools could add personnel to reduce class sizes, hire more counselors, modernize libraries and science labs, and renovate older facilities.

The initiative is the latest in a string of reform efforts advanced by Romer and the school board. Over the past year, the school system has worked to convert high schools into smaller learning communities, recruit and retain fully credentialed teachers at some of the district's lowest-performing schools, and require high school students to take more rigorous, college-prep courses. ■

REPORTS

Academic skills equally valuable to success in college or workplace

In an increasingly high-tech economy, high school graduates entering the workforce need to have academic skills comparable to those of students enrolling in college.

That's the conclusion of a new study conducted by ACT Inc., which examined almost 500,000 scores on the ACT college-admissions test, and WorkKeys, an assessment tool used by employers to measure the "real world" skills of potential employees.

ACT discovered that many trade occupations—such as that of a plumber, electrician, or carpenter—require vocational or postsecondary training that demands a relatively high level of math and reading skills, much like those of a college freshman.

ACT concluded that all high school students should have a common academic program. "We can't afford to have one expectation for students who plan to attend college and another for those who plan to enter the workforce or workforce training programs after high school," said company CEO Richard L. Ferguson.

Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different? is available at www.act.org.

More urban schools labeled 'in need of improvement'

Title I schools identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act are increasingly concentrated in large and urban school districts, concludes a report sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

A three-year study by the SRI International's Center for Education Policy, a California-based research group, studied how schools, school districts, and states were implementing the accountability provisions of NCLB. Among its findings:

- In 2003-04, 53 percent of Title I schools identified for improvement were located in urban school districts, up from 39 percent in 2001-02.
- Almost one-quarter (24 percent) of Title I urban schools were identified for improvement.
- Roughly one-third (36 percent) of all Title I schools were in large or very large districts, yet two-thirds (66 percent) of Title I schools "in need of improvement" were in these districts.
- Although only 41 percent of Title I schools were located in poorer districts, they accounted for 73 percent of Title I schools identified for improvement.
- Schools in smaller districts were more likely to exit "in need of improvement" status than those in larger districts.

Title I Accountability and School Improvement From 2001 to 2004 is available at www.sri.com.

Study examines lessons learned from reform models

A recent study reviewed five "challenges" to high school reform and outlined what lessons could be learned from the experiences of three models currently used in more than 2,500 high schools nationwide.

The report, conducted by MDRC, a nonprofit research group, looked at how Career Academies, First Things First, and Talent Development have "grappled with the challenges of improving low-performing urban and rural schools."

Among some of the study's findings:

- Small learning communities create a personalized and caring environment.
- Programs aimed at ninth-graders can help students succeed in the critical first year of high school.
- Teachers benefit from well-designed curricula and lesson plans that already are developed.
- Advanced training and ongoing coaching can help teachers be more successful.
- Career awareness programs can prepare students for the world beyond high school.
- Effective change demands an investment of personnel resources, and school officials must be sure that a school has personnel with the vision and capacity to reform itself.

Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from Research on Three Reform Models is available at www.mdrc.org. ■

CUBE Annual Conference places spotlight on educating diverse student body

How to provide an excellent education to the most diverse group of students in the history of urban education is the topic of CUBE's 38th Annual Conference, Sept. 28-Oct. 1, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Phoenix, Ariz.

The conference's theme, *Building Culturally Competent Governance for Urban Schools*, will look at the need for leadership that's based in cultural competence and has a true commitment to inclusive and equitable education, says CUBE Director Katrina Kelley.

Given the increasing cultural diversification of urban schools, this is a conference that urban school leaders won't want to miss. Among the activities scheduled:

Thursday, Sept. 28

• **Wake Up Call: Impact of Health Issues on Urban Schoolchildren:** Join this session to learn about national urban health and behavioral data and trends, strategies that urban districts are using to respond to health issues, and steps school policymakers can take to have effective action on these challenges.

• **CUBE's Ongoing Conversation on Race Series:** Take this opportunity to explore issues of race, and develop the proper tools to help you address the race-based decision-making that board members commonly face.

• **Annual Federal Legislative Update:** As the second session of the 109th Congress draws to a close, learn the impact of the legislative actions on urban public schools and anticipate proposals from the new 110th Congress, when the No Child Left Behind Act is scheduled for reauthorization.

• **First-time CUBE Meeting Attendee Reception**

Friday, Sept. 29

• Tour one of six of Phoenix's most successful and innovative school campuses.

• **CUBE's State of Urban Education Address:** Brian K. Perkins, CUBE Steering Committee chair and board president, New Haven, Conn.

Phoenix is a city rich in history and culture, making it an appropriate location for the theme of this year's CUBE Annual Conference.

• **Urban Student Achievement Task Force:** Join the task force as it examines the achievement gap between urban students and their non-urban counterparts and explores programs that are helping students achieve.

• **CUBE Annual Award – Best Practices:** Learn the best practices from recognized districts chosen for the 2006 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence.

• **Communications Task Force: From Civil Disobedience to Civic Education:** Today's charged political environment provides a number of opportunities for unrest, civil disobedience, and public strife in urban schools. Learn how districts have turned such potential public relations disasters into opportunities for learning and understanding.

• **CUBE Annual Reception**

Saturday, Sept. 30

• **Keynote Address and Breakfast:** Join a distinguished speaker to gain insights about the condition of Hispanic education in Arizona and the national implications for urban districts

• **The Evolution of Charter Schools:** Nearly one out of every four public schools—more than 500—in Arizona is a charter school. Join this critical session to review Arizona politics, the state's charter-friendly law, the evolution of the state's charter school system, and its outcomes for public school students.

• **Briefing: Omaha Public Schools:** Join this important discussion about student enrollment, race, and class from leaders of Omaha, Neb., who will also discuss the events that led to the state's controversial decision to divide the school system into three racially identifiable districts.

• **Flores v. Arizona School-Finance Lawsuit and Proposition 203, Arizona's English-Only Law:** Learn about the policy and legal battles over the teaching of English in Arizona's schools and the implications for the rest of the country.

• **Immigration and Urban Public Education:** Explore how urban school districts are managing the growing immigrant population, particularly at a time when funding has not kept pace with student increases.

• **Confronting the Urban Graduation Rate Issue:** Join this important session to learn about the most promising models for helping high school students graduate with their peers.

• **Serving Native American Students in Urban Schools:** Explore what educational strategies are working to improve the achievement of Native American schoolchildren.

• **CUBE Annual Banquet:** Join us for the presentation of the 2006 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence.

Sunday, October 1

• **District Workshops and Breakfast:** Meet with peers and discuss the different approaches to English language acquisition and whether strategies should be organized schoolwide or as separate programs. Sponsored by the CUBE Racial Isolation Task Force. ■

Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau

Mentors help new teachers face challenges

Collaborative programs prove to be valuable for urban schools

With so many first-time teachers leaving the profession after only a few years on the job, urban school districts can work to change that trend by using experienced mentors to help new teachers cope with the stress and challenges of an urban classroom.

The Memphis City Schools began developing its mentoring program in 2003 in collaboration with the University of Memphis, says Vivian Gunn Morris, director of the university's New Teacher Center.

A cadre of teachers was recruited from the district's most exemplary veterans and released from regular classroom duties to work full-time with new teachers, she says. Mentors meet weekly with teachers, observe and coach them, offer emotional support, and assist with planning, classroom management, instructional strategies, and facilitate communications with the principal.

Such support, coupled with added professional development, has resulted in higher retention rates, and an evaluation of the program showed that mentored teachers use "best practices" more frequently in the classroom.

"Having a full-time mentoring program, a high-quality program, is a tremendous help," Morris says.

A mentoring program pays off for urban school districts because, if teachers can be kept in the classroom, more urban children are taught by experienced teachers instead of novices, officials say. Higher retention rates also reduce a district's teacher recruitment costs.

These programs are particularly valuable for urban schools, as teacher shortages can be as much as 50 percent higher than in suburban schools, according to a government study.

The mentoring program in Nashville, Tenn., certainly has gotten the attention of Superintendent Pedro Garcia. He says he's seeing a boost in teacher retention since the program was established.

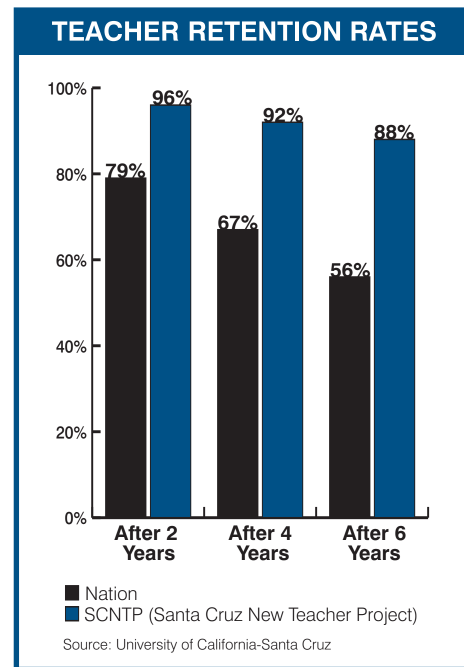
Extensive professional development and the guiding hand of mentors are necessary to help new teachers learn about classroom management and the social and cultural diversity in poorer schools, he says. In essence, mentors and principals "do a lot of holding hands" in a teacher's first year.

"The first month can be very brutal," Garcia says. "Just because a teacher has taken the classes doesn't mean they know how to teach. You've got to provide teachers with these opportunities so that, when they get into the classroom, they're not scared to death."

That's particularly true for white, middle-class teachers who may not understand that many urban students grow up in households where they've never learned to sit down and be quiet, Morris says. Urban students can be vocal and energetic in the classroom, and a new teacher needs "to learn how to use that energy to accomplish the goals they have."

One of the biggest mentoring programs is in New York City, which two years ago launched an initiative to create a pool of more than 300 full-time mentors to work with the 5,000 to 6,000 new teachers hired by the district each year.

The city's program is based on a teacher induction model developed by the New Teacher Center at the University of California-Santa Cruz—and also in use in Memphis. Studies have shown the approach can boost teacher retention rates after six years to as high as 88 percent. ■



LESSONS ON MENTORING PROGRAMS

After studying the first year of New York City's mentoring program, the New Teacher Center at the University of California-Santa Cruz published a "policy paper" outlining five important lessons that researchers had learned:

- **Lesson 1: Build political will for reform of induction systems.** Success depends on widespread support and commitment to a program. To build that support, disseminate research to policymakers and district leaders about the benefits of a mentor program and the costs associated with high teacher turnover.
- **Lesson 2: Ensure all mentoring programs develop and maintain a high-quality selection process.** Set rigorous criteria for selecting mentors, then aggressively recruit them and collaborate with the teachers union and principals to find the district's most talented educators.
- **Lesson 3: Identify and support successful program standards.** Crucial to a program's success is the release of veteran teachers to work full time as mentors, ensure they work 1.25 to 1.5 hours per week with each new teacher, and provide support to new teachers for at least two years.
- **Lesson 4: Align mentoring program and general induction activities with district and regional programs related to teacher development.** Create a systemic plan to enable all staff to support new teachers and maintain "regular, ongoing conversations" with university-based schools of education and alternative certification programs to improve training for future teachers.
- **Lesson 5: Address systemic and infrastructure issues that impact new teachers.** Address school practices that thwart new teacher success. For example, find ways to decrease the workload for new teachers, and restructure the timelines for early teacher hiring and placement to ensure teachers in shortage areas are the first to be placed.

A copy of the policy paper is available at www.newteachercenter.org.

GROWING

Continued from page 1

be foreign-born, many with little or no fluency in English.

For cities with well-established Hispanic communities, such as Los Angeles or Houston, this demographic trend promises to add to the challenges in educating Hispanic children. For school systems that are far afield of traditional Hispanic enclaves—such as Nashville; Providence, R.I.; Raleigh, N.C.; and Lansing, Mich. – programs must be adapted to meet the educational realities of this increasingly prominent population.

Many are counting on urban school leaders to meet this challenge. The federal government, of course, already is pushing school districts—through the No Child Left Behind Act—to improve English literacy and achievement among Hispanic children. And, according to a report by the National Research Council, the nation itself needs urban schools to succeed: With a rapidly aging population and an increasingly competitive global economy, the U.S. cannot afford a large, undereducated Hispanic workforce that will earn less, pay fewer taxes, and put greater demands on social services.

"Given the projected growth of the Hispanic population over the next quarter-century," the report concludes, "compromising the future economic prospects of Hispanics by under-investing in their education will likely compromise the nation's future as well."

The power of language

A strong command of English is the primary prerequisite to success in the 21st century. Many Hispanic children speak fluent English, but for those who don't, the single most important thing that urban schools can do is to help them gain fluency, says Adam Chavarria, executive director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

"Unlike immigrants at the turn of the century, when they could be absorbed into the economy as long as they had a strong back and a willingness to work," he says, "we're in a knowledge-based economy where today's immigrants don't have the luxury of three generations to learn English."

That reality is well recognized. In Omaha, Neb., the school system has made a major investment in teaching English fluency. One of its most successful efforts is a dual-language program where elementary and high school students spend half their time studying in Spanish and half in English. In some classes, a teacher introduces the lesson in one language, teaches it in the other, and summarizes the lesson in the first language.

The use of both languages helps students pick up the academic content in Spanish as they improve their English language skills, says Susan Mayberger, the district's supervisor of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs.

"We're finding that students in the dual language program in elementary school are outperforming their peers who had 100 percent English [instruction]," she says. "So we keep increasing the number of students we can serve."

With a limited number of bilingual teachers, the district also relies on traditional ESL classes. Instruction is intensive, particularly for older students who may spend as many as five hours a day with an ESL-certified teacher in a classroom with a low student-teacher ratio. Tutoring also is available to help students master English more quickly.

The results of this effort are clear: student achievement is up. "The data that we have is that we are bridging the achievement gap," Mayberger says. "We're not there yet. It's easier to do in the elementary grades than in the secondary grades. But we can document increased student achievement."

Student achievement also is rising in San Antonio, which is relying on a "very strong" bilingual program and a sizable cadre of teachers trained to work with ESL students, says Luz Garcia-Martin, the district's director for bilingual and ESL services.

Instruction in Spanish keeps students advancing academically, but an increasing amount of time is spent learning in English, she says. As older students move to more traditional English-language class-

LOOK AT ORIGINS, NOT GENERALIZATIONS

When talking about the education of "Hispanic children," it's important to avoid making too many generalizations. Instructional decisions, educators say, must account for the great diversity—in family income, past education experience, cultural and national background, and English fluency—within the Hispanic students being served.

The reality, says Harry Garewal, a member of the Phoenix Union High school board and the CUBE Steering Committee, is that urban schools serve both newly arrived immigrants and third-generation, native-born Americans. Some have a good command of English; others do not. Some are kindergarteners who attended a good preschool; others are teenagers with little or no schooling.

"School boards need to be aware of the changing demographics and to the point that the Hispanic population is not a homogenous group," he says.

One important piece of information is the national origins of your Hispanic students, Garewal says. Levels of poverty and educational opportunities vary across Central and South America, and urban schools enrolling, for example, many Mexican immigrants are more likely to face instructional

challenges—and see higher dropout rates—than schools educating immigrants from some other countries.

At the same time, schools serving U.S.-born Cuban immigrants will, on average, find their students' families financially better off—and more likely to speak English—than U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants.

"You need to find out where the majority of your students are coming from," Garewal says. "Then you can look at the educational opportunities in those countries. I think, as a rule, you'll have a much better idea of what to expect of that student population coming in."

AP Photo/The Arizona Republic, Tom Tingle

es, the goal is to ensure they have teachers who have some training in ESL strategies. For new immigrants, a “newcomers” class provides a valuable introduction to school and the language.

To do that, however, requires a commitment to professional development, Garcia-Martin says. Training is year-round, and two special symposiums provide intensive training to 500 to 600 teachers at a time. In some cases, schools team ESL-certified teachers with regular teachers in co-teaching programs to maximize the impact of trained personnel.

Even with a good program, teaching large numbers of children to be fluent in English is a difficult and time-consuming task, she says. But, “it’s something that can be resolved. It’s a matter of being creative with what resources are available … and evaluating your program every year and looking at how you can improve it.”

Basic academics

When looking at the educational needs of Hispanic students, it’s important to remember that children are children. Hispanic students need what all children need: a qualified teacher, a good curriculum, solid instruction, and remedial and intervention services if they are falling behind academically.

In the nation’s urban areas, however, there is an added reality: Hispanic children tend to be segregated into the poorest—and, at the high school level, the largest—schools in a district. They attend schools with some of the least-qualified and least-experienced teachers, the fewest resources, and the oldest facilities.

That reality is true for many minority children, and every urban school board is attempting—to varying degrees of success—to turn that around. But where success is seen in boosting Hispanic student achievement, there’s no simple formula that maps out why. Every district points to a quite different mix of initiatives—although many with common, sound instructional practices—to explain their progress.

In Phoenix Unified, for example, there is no “silver bullet” that officials point to as the definitive reason they’ve closed much of the achievement gap for Hispanic children. Instead, they point to numerous initiatives—a greater focus on reading and math, new curricula and instructional techniques, professional development, and more opportunities for student tutoring—that, in total, are making a difference.

Garewal points to two Phoenix Unified programs that stand out in his mind. Both—a summer academic academy and a computerized remedial program—target incoming high school freshmen who need help bringing their reading and writing skills up to grade level. But, with the exception of the district’s push to teach English fluency, he says that all programming is “designed for the entire student population.”

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

English proficiency varies with family backgrounds

6.3% Percentage of foreign-born Hispanics who speak English only at home

36.1% Percentage of U.S.-born Hispanics who speak English only at home

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, ages 5 and under

One area where boards might focus more attention is preschool, say some educators. For both cultural and financial reasons, Hispanic parents are half as likely as whites or blacks to enroll in such programs. Yet many children would benefit from an earlier exposure to English and educational activities that could boost their academic success in primary school.

But changing attitudes will take work, says Melissa Lazarin, senior policy analyst for education reform at the National Council of La Raza. Many preschool programs lack the capacity to help preschoolers learn English or to communicate with non-English-speaking parents—and that only adds to the reluctance of Hispanic parents to enroll their children.

“I think it’s really time for preschool programs to be able to work with English language learners,” she says. “Many schools don’t have that capacity. But we’re seeing that, more and more, a lot of parents aren’t going to put their child in a center where they can’t communicate with the teachers and where the teachers cannot communicate with the children.”

The power of family

“Every day I witness the lack of motivation of children and teens who, not having anything to do, little by little are losing interest in moving forward.”

Those words, spoken by a mother at a public hearing of the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, underscore a brutal reality for urban school leaders: too many Hispanic students give up on school—and too few set their sights on a college education.

The statistics tell the tale: Only 64 percent of Hispanic students complete high school, and but one in 10 graduate from a four-year college or university.

Academic failure does much to account for these numbers. Where school officials are successfully boosting student achievement, the statistics improve greatly. In Phoenix Union, for example, as student test scores have risen, the dropout rate has declined—from 17.6 percent in the mid-1990s to 5.4 percent today.

Meanwhile, the path to college is strewn with obstacles throughout a Hispanic student’s school career, say educators. Too few young Hispanics get the head start they need by attending preschool. Too many are not advancing quickly enough in English fluency or academics, and too few are encouraged by educators to take the rigorous academic courses needed to prepare them for college.

Many students come from a background that makes college appear an unrealistic goal. Two out of three Hispanic children live in families where neither parent has a high school diploma, and some older children feel the need to leave

school to help support their family financially. The cost of higher education also is viewed as an insurmountable obstacle.

"Whether they've a 4.0 average or they're a dropout kid, we've found that it is hard making them believe that college is for them," says Karen Sanchez-Griego, executive director of Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) New Mexico.

The solution for ENLACE-New Mexico is to change the attitude of students and parents through an outreach program to the community. Working with school systems such as Phoenix Union, the organization has established Family Resource Centers in schools where parents can enroll in adult education classes, seek counseling, and find fellow community members who speak their language and can help them become more involved in their children's education.

"Officials in large minority schools sometimes don't understand why parents don't come to school," Sanchez-Griego says. "The reality is they're intimidated. So we try to educate them, give them support."

This support builds better ties between school and home. As parents become more involved in school, it's easier to win their support for interventions and counseling that will push students toward college, she says. Tutoring, summer study programs, university tours, college-prep coursework, and advice on applying for scholarships and admissions all help steer students onto a college track—or at least improve their chance to stay in school.

The power of family also is tapped by Omaha school officials, who partner with one of the city's most important Hispanic community groups, the Chicano Awareness Center, to provide an adult leadership and education program for parents. "It's very empowering," Mayberger says. "Now parents are working for the school district. They've developed a skill set that connects them to the school district."

As parents become more engaged in the education of their children, Omaha officials are working harder to communicate the message that college is for Hispanic students. A Latino Leadership Club and minority scholarship program have been established to give advice and support as students apply for college admission and scholarships.

Outreach and community partnerships were among the strategies endorsed three years ago by a presidential advisory commission on Hispanic education. Today, the federal government is trying to encourage these efforts with its Partnership for Hispanic Family Learning, a national network of public and private organizations that Chavarria hopes will greatly expand the information and support needed to help Hispanic families improve the educational attainment of their children.

It's a strategy of collaboration that urban school boards need to embrace if they hope to make a difference, he says. "Hispanic families represent a significant resource in our communities, and we need to ensure they are fully aware of all the opportunities within their reach. If educators view parents as partners in their effort to teach children, they'll find they have more [support] than they might otherwise have perceived."

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