

EDUCATION

Education gap may affect swift-growing Hispanic population

By *Georgia Pabst* of the *Journal Sentinel*

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With the number of Latino schoolchildren expected to nearly double by 2050, Latino education is a growth industry, a researcher at the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington said Wednesday at the opening session in Milwaukee of a conference on educating and graduating Latino high school students.

"According to projections, almost all the growth for K-12 nationally will be because of the addition of Hispanic children, which are the major growth group," said Richard Fry, a senior research associate at Pew and a national expert on the analysis of U.S. education and demographic data.

Hispanics make up 20% of the school-age population, he said. That's projected to nearly double to 39% by 2050, he said at the conference sponsored by the Council for the Spanish Speaking at the Wyndham Milwaukee Airport and Convention Center.

"By 2050 Hispanics will be the largest school-age population," he said.

Yet educational attainment among Hispanics ages 20 and older lags, with 59% of Hispanic adults completing high school, compared with 86% for whites and 77% for African-Americans, he said.

Among Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 24, a fourth will not finish school, he said.

"That's a daunting figure with significant consequences for them," he said.

Dropping out and the lack of a high school education diminishes prospects in the labor market and the military and means lower wages and higher rates of incarceration, he said.

Because of the increasing numbers of Hispanic students, parents, educators and teachers need to know more about the "knowledge gap" and how to close it so more Latinos graduate from high school and go on to college or postsecondary education, said Abdin Noboa Rios, a former teacher, guidance counselor, school administrator and researcher who is now a Washington-based consultant.

He said that for students, reading and reading proficiency are "the single most powerful predictor of college success."

Research also shows that preschool education among Latinos is the lowest in the nation.

"By third grade, we are already behind by almost one year, and by grade eight, half perform below basic," he said. By 12th grade, Latinos perform at the 8th-grade level of whites.

More than half of Latino students entering college never return for a second year, he said.

Among other things, he said, research also shows:

- How teachers teach is as important as what they teach.
- Parents are the greatest predictor of success - more than teachers - because they are the first and most influential teacher in a child's life.
- Bilingual education works and is not the same as English as a Second Language. Bilingual students do better in school than monolingual students.

- Classroom size is not very important. Large classes with master teachers are preferable to small classes with mediocre teachers.
- Cultural competence is important but greatly misunderstood.

The conference continues Thursday with discussions and workshops about schools and strategies that work.

The conference also will develop recommendations on how to improve Hispanic high school graduation rates and how better to prepare students for college, said Tony Baez, the chief executive of the Council for the Spanish Speaking.



About Georgia Pabst

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