



**LULAC National Education Agenda:**  
**Challenges and Policy Recommendations 2002-2003**

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**League of United Latin American Citizens**

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### **League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**

The Mission of the League of United Latin American Citizens is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.

LULAC seeks to increase the number of Hispanics serving in appointed and career positions within the Federal government at all levels.

**THE LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS**

**National Office**

**2002-2003**

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In 2002, LULAC formed the National Education Task Force to address the countless issues affecting Hispanic students. The Task Force consists of members with a rich diversity of backgrounds from around the country and share a keen concern about the state of education of Latinos in America. This issues brief presents some of the challenges facing the Hispanic community in the education system and offers some recommendations for improvement.

This issues brief marks a first attempt to establish a LULAC National Education Agenda to serve as a guide for LULAC members in their advocacy efforts. This brief also serves as a notice to policymakers who make decisions about education regarding what LULAC educators are witnessing in their classrooms and what they expect.

One third of the Latino population is under the age of 18. One in five Hispanics in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 left American schools without either a high school diploma or an alternative certificate such as a GED (US Census Bureau 1998). We are faced with a situation of crisis proportions and must challenge the country to secure the future of both our young people and the United States. Although Hispanic children are the largest minority group in America's schools today, they lag behind non-Hispanics in almost all categories of education.

The numbers are alarming. Latinos remain the most likely to drop out, the most likely to be found in large urban, high poverty schools, and the least likely to enroll in college. Lastly, and of great concern, according to the 2000 Issues Conference Policy Recommendations Report of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, there are more male Hispanic children of school age in detention and penal institutions than there are enrolled in regular school and educational programs. This education issues brief is a call to action.

## **CHALLENGES**

**History of Neglect from Educational and Political Communities.** Hispanic dropout rates have remained largely an invisible problem to all but Hispanic students, their parents, and their communities. Although many researchers and some policymakers have been aware of the problem, discussions of Hispanic dropout rates have often been submerged in discussions of dropouts in general, the education of ethnic minorities in general, or politicized debates about immigration, language, and bilingualism. There has been little disaggregation of the Hispanic experience in the school system.

**Weak National Education Policy.** Although LULAC embraces the vision documented by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which holds schools, districts and states to high accountability standards for all students, we believe that the result of this Act is may increase the negative impact on poor, under-financed, urban public schools. Urban

schools are already stretched financially. If they fail to meet state standards by at least 50 percent, they risk losing funding. The provision in the Act which provides that students in poor-performing schools may leave, fails to create incentives for school improvement. Furthermore, educational policies targeting at-risk urban populations do not serve the same for immigrant youth. In addition, students who take English Language Acquisition (ELA) courses are often treated as if they are in remedial courses. This creates a stigma for the students before their teachers and peers, increasing the possibility for student dropout rates in the immigrant community. Hispanics account for 56 percent of all U.S. immigrants; yet they account for 90 percent of all immigrant dropouts.

**Inequity of Resources/Urban Schools.** Seventy percent of Latino youth attend segregated, urban, under-financed public schools. Urban schools are themselves also in crisis. Over 39 percent of Hispanic children live in families with incomes that fall below the poverty line, a rate that is more than twice as great as that of white non-Hispanic children. A recent report of the Harvard Project on School Desegregation to the National School Boards Association describes the changing patterns of segregation and poverty since 1968. The study found that segregation by race is strongly correlated with segregation by poverty. The study also provides national data demonstrating that both African American and Latino students are much more likely to be in segregated and poorly funded schools than white students. According to the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda “2000 Public Policy Agenda,” schools with less than four percent minority enrollment on average have 14 students per computer, compared to schools with more than 24 percent minority enrollment which on average have 18 students per computer. This discrepancy is even higher in Hispanic households where students are 59 percent less likely to have access to a computer.

**School Size/School Bureaucracy.** While seventy percent of Hispanic students attend large public high schools, research overwhelmingly indicates that smaller schools enable students to realize greater self esteem and educational success. The University of Michigan reports that the ideal school size is approximately 600-700 students. Large and bloated school bureaucracies have also greatly contributed to inefficiency in school policies and procedures, particularly as they relate to attendance and discipline procedures.

**Preschool Education.** Hispanic children under the age of three are less likely to be enrolled in pre-school programs than their white and African-American counterparts. Because Hispanic children are severely under-represented in quality pre-school programs they are not as well prepared to enter into kindergarten and proceed into elementary school. This is particularly critical when taking into account children who are non-English speakers, 80 percent of whom are Hispanic.

**High Stakes Testing.** Although tests are an important evaluation instrument in assessing the needs of schools and students, emphasis on high-stakes testing has shifted attention from a school’s overall mission—to provide an education. The emphasis in many school districts on testing as the sole means of evaluation creates barriers for students and dissuades teachers from keeping students in the classroom. More emphasis is placed on

learning the test than is placed on learning the skills needed to pass the test. Furthermore, as a result of the demands from high-stakes testing, many school officials are less inclined to keep poor performing students in school thus, contributing to overall dropout rates.

**Cultural/Language Conflicts.** Although more extensive research is required, initial data indicates that public schools are unresponsiveness to cultural and language issues. These issues remain among the most perplexing items that contribute to the distinction between Latino youth and African-American youth, especially as it relates to academic success. Poor communication between the school administrators and parents, limits the parents' ability to effectively contribute to their children's education. Often parents' initial contact with educational institutions is negative resulting in distrust and apprehension of school officials and systems. Furthermore, Limited English Proficient (LEP) children are stigmatized. English Language Acquisition (ELA) should not be viewed as a remedial problem. Many institutions lump LEP and remedial students together despite dramatically different needs. Children in these programs are often treated as if they were physiologically impaired instead of being held to the same high academic standards as native-English speaking children.

**Low Income/Poverty Factors.** Thirty-nine percent of Hispanic children live in families with incomes below the poverty line. In general, children from families in the lowest income brackets are eight times more likely to drop out of school, than those from families with a higher income. Many Latino households rely on pooled income to survive. Young adults contribute to the family income pool. These financial constraints pose a significant problem for Hispanics wishing to go on to higher education. Poverty and dropout rates also correlate. In addition, there is a cyclical nature to dropout status, poor parents who dropped out of school are more likely to have children who dropout of school as well.

**Migrant Students.** Roughly 80 percent of migrant children are Latino. Migration, extreme poverty, and isolation from "mainstream" communities make these children and at-risk students the most vulnerable in our public education system. Virtually all, migrant children live in poverty. Only 40 percent of the parents of migrant children have completed the eighth-grade. More than one in six migrant students are behind their grade level with the rate increasing as students reach the higher grades. Migrant students have drop out rates of between 50 and 60 percent. Many migrant students are also migrant workers and agriculture is a dangerous business. Poverty, combined with pesticide exposure, physical labor, the operation of dangerous equipment, and limited access to health care means that migrant students come to school with a series of health issues that can negatively impact a student's education. Migrant students are national students in the sense that they move seasonally across city, county, state, and regional lines.

**Low Expectations.** Even as the numbers of Latino high school graduates increase, they are less likely than white graduates to have completed the "New Standards" curriculum, which includes four years of English and three years of science, social studies, and

mathematics.<sup>1</sup> In 1992, Latino graduates were less likely than white students to have taken geometry, physics, or a combination of biology, chemistry, and physics, while they were more likely to have taken remedial mathematics. Additionally, a disproportionate number of Latino students are tracked into low level courses and are not provided with the opportunity to take three years of math and science.

**Grade Retention.** Grade retention is one of the major factors contributing to school dropout rates. Indeed, when looking at the overall picture, a correlation between dropout and retention rates becomes apparent. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics demonstrates that most students who decide to drop out have repeated one or more grades. In 1993, 41 percent had repeated more than one grade, 17 percent had repeated one grade, and 9 percent had not repeated a grade.

**Early Hispanic Dropout Rates.** Latinos not only have higher dropout rates than the rest of the population, they also tend to drop out earlier than other students. In 1993, 40 percent of Hispanic dropouts had not completed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Another 18 percent of Latino dropouts completed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but left school before completing the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and over one half (58 percent) of Hispanic dropouts have less than a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education. Only 29 percent of white dropouts and 24 percent of black dropouts leave as early as Hispanics do. Furthermore, the research on dropout rates tends to focus on the failure of the student and does little to examine the context in which they fail. Rarely is the question asked whether the student is a product of an educational system that has either been unable to meet the needs of students or simply does not try to match them. The tendency to minimize the role of institutions and the socioeconomic circumstances constrains individual choice.

**Lack of Advocacy.** Hispanic youth have very few people who are able or willing to advocate on their behalf in their schools. This is due in part to the low educational achievement of their parents, language, cultural barriers, and economic factors. The Hispanic community therefore relies heavily on advocacy that is provided by community based organizations such as LULAC and Council of La Raza.

**Weak Higher Education Participation.** Out of the total population of 35.5 million Hispanics, today Latino youth hold 8.9 percent of associate degrees; 10 percent of bachelor degrees; 4.4 percent master's degrees and 3.2 percent of all doctorate degrees awarded in 2000. These dismal statistics exist in a decade that demands double the number of engineers, health care aides, and high-tech specialists.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Develop Dropout Prevention Policies that are Locally-Based and Expand the Criteria for High-Stakes Decision-making.** High dropout rates in the Hispanic community can be attributed to various inefficiencies and inadequacies throughout the educational system, from institutional problems to socioeconomic factors. Intervention measures must be aimed at the elementary level and secondary level, since a very large

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<sup>1</sup> 44 percent compared to 54 percent in 1994.

percent of Hispanic students drop out of school before the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. According to Aspira Association, Inc. three of the most important factors used to predict whether a Latino will stay in school include age, grades, and absences, all of which can be affected by school policies and practices. Further policy research regarding the attendance patterns of Latino students must focus equally on the attendance policies and practices at the district/school level. Many school policies use Hispanic students' excessive absences to suspend students rather than to conduct formal suspensions. Schools need to develop effective intervention systems that examine the above mentioned factors. When making high-stakes academic decisions, the criteria used for decisions related to retention, tracking, and graduation must be expanded to include grades and teacher evaluations.

**Increase Funding for Schools and Improve Access to Funding for Community Based Organizations to Assist School Systems.** It is not sufficient to simply set goals or standards without providing schools with the necessary funding to implement programs that specifically address the Latino community. At a minimum, for fiscal year 2003, the following funding is required:

- Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act  
Program for English Language Learners \$1.2 billion
- TRIO Programs 1 billion
- Title I, Part C, Migrant Education 500 million
- GEAR UP 425 million
- Adult ESL Civics 250 million
- Title I, Part H, Dropout Prevention 125 million
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions 125 million
- Local Family Information Centers 50 million
- HEP-CAMP 50 million

**Promote Improvement of Teaching and Counseling Standards.** The growing number of Hispanic children in the classroom require a renewed emphasis on teaching tolerance and appreciation for diverse cultures. Latino children are gifted when given an opportunity to shine. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to raise the bar on achievement. Every effort should be made to eliminate remedial connotations associated with English language acquisition. The academic success of children for whom English is not their primary language is just as critical as the educational success of those students who speak English fluently. Schools must enable Latino students to achieve high academic standards in all areas including math, science, and English.

- **Professional Development of Standards in Practice.** Teachers and administrators need to increase their standards in practice. School personnel should be provided with standards and assessments to improve classroom work. Teachers should be required to meet regularly and examine their assignments in order to increase expectations of students. Principals, administrators, and parents should also be invested in this form of training.

- **National Cultural Competency Program and Increased Diversity in the Teaching/Administrative Body.** Schools should be urged to organize and provide educational experiences that increase the cultural proficiency of all teachers, whether or not they speak another language. These activities should aim to create a school community that maintains a multicultural curriculum and environment, in addition to English language acquisition. Educational outcomes are enhanced and dropout and grade retention rates are reduced when schools are staffed with sufficient Hispanic personnel to serve as mentors and role models.
- **National Program for School Counselors.** School counselors are in a unique and critical position to help students define and reach high academic standards. Yet, little or nothing is being done to prepare future school counselors to serve as advocates for Latino students in a standards-based system. It is important to create training procedures to implement a national professional development effort to update the skills of practicing school counselors as well as create curricula and an environment that is truly multicultural. Teachers and counselors do not have to be bilingual, but they do need cultural awareness and sensitivity. Finally, additional funds for guidance support are often necessary because counselors are often weighed down with clerical work.
- **Guidance/Post-Secondary Programs.** There is a need to develop guidance programs to address the needs of Latino youth and their parents. This is especially important because so many Latinos are first generation college-bound. Their parents do not necessarily have the background or the awareness to help them through the admissions testing and financial aid system. Community based programs such as LULAC National Education Service Centers, Aspira, and others increase support and assist school systems and parents in preparing Latino students for college.

**Improve and Expand *Head Start, Even Start Programs and Sites.*** The country is experiencing many new growth areas that are not traditionally accustomed to working with limited English proficient (LEP) children. It is important to encourage Head Start and Even Start programs to adopt curricula and development programs that take into account these newly emerging populations. Considering the overall growth of the Hispanic community, both native and foreign born, more resources need to be allocated to both the emerging-community schools and to traditional receiving areas. There is ample evidence that early intervention gives children a leg-up in academic study. Increased support for community-based organizations like LNESOC is critical to the enhancement of available school resources and outreach to the Latino community.

**Increase Parental Involvement.** Parents need to be involved earlier in the process through a system, which is culturally sensitive and non-threatening. Parents must be adequately informed about their children's education and the expectations of their schools in order to become better advocates. Parental participation is key to the improvement of a student's education regardless of a child's age, their economic status or whether their parents completed high school. National parental involvement policies should require that teachers receive adequate training so as to encourage meaningful

interaction between parents and administrators. Federal programs should provide adequate resources to increase programs that enhance parental participation, leadership, and understanding of the educational system. The needs of Latino parents are especially critical when considering the large number of Hispanic children who drop out of school and wind up in detention and penal programs.

**Access to Technology.** Technology's unparalleled power and impact on the economy and the business world has created a demand for a more specialized workforce. Yet, as stated earlier, Latino children primarily attend schools in poverty-ridden urban areas with little access to these wonders. Latino children need to be guaranteed access to these tools to ensure that they not be disadvantaged when the time comes to enter the work force. To bridge the digital divide, necessary support must be given to get computers into the classroom and improve internet access in the classroom and libraries should be supported. Additional funds should be provided for programs to increase the number of Latinos who enroll in computer science majors. Furthermore, we need to find ways to close the technology gap through innovative programs and allocate resources to community-based organizations in Hispanic and low-income neighborhoods. One way to bridge the digital divide in low-income communities is to create and operate Community Technology Centers (CTCs) and provide access to all children and adults.

**Build More Schools and Improve Infrastructure of Existing Schools.** School districts are under severe budgetary pressures and federal demands to improve their standards. Yet, while schools are being held accountable, they are also falling apart, particularly in the inner cities, where most Hispanic students are located. It is imperative that schools be repaired and updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many current facilities are entirely inadequate for children to learn.

**Address the Needs of Undocumented Children.** Each year, about 50,000 to 75,000 undocumented students, who live in the United States for at least five years, graduate from US high schools. Most of these students are brought here at a young age and almost all of them speak English and consider themselves Americans. But, their lives are filled with uncertainty and hold little hope for the future as long as they cannot regularize their immigration status. As a practical matter, very few of them qualify for any immigration relief, no matter how long they live here or how difficult it would be for them to adjust to life in their countries of origin. Under current law, almost all of these students will be prevented from attending college because they cannot afford out-of-state tuition and do not qualify for Pell grants or student loans. Among those prevented from completing their education are class valedictorians and Grade-A students, creative talents, and idealistic youngsters committed to bettering their communities. The same harsh rules apply to all of these students regardless of individual ability, circumstances, or length of residence in the United States. The Student Adjustment Act (SAA) seeks to free these students and empower them to reach their dreams and fully contribute to their adopted country.

**Address the Needs of Migrant Children.** It is important to continue building support structures for migrant students so that they may achieve success both in and out of

school. These students' needs are unique because of their frequent mobility, which emphasizes the need for nationwide programs. Because the number of children eligible for services has grown exponentially, it is essential that funding for Migrant Education Programs be increased from FY 2002 \$396M to \$500M for FY2003. Furthermore, the health care challenges of the migrant student population need to be more effectively addressed. Educating migrant children presents unique challenges to state and local education programs that can only be addressed through a strong national program. The No Child Left Behind Act requires strict accountability measures for all students, including migrant children. Ensuring that migrant students are appropriately included in state accountability systems will require additional resources. Furthermore, the reauthorized Migrant Education Program requires the electronic transfer of migrant student records among the states, which also demands an investment of resources. Unfortunately, the president's budget does not live up to this promise for migrant children.

**Expand Bilingual/Bicultural Education:** Non-native English speakers are lacking a specific language skill, not intelligence. It is imperative that national and state policies emphasize the assets that immigrant children bring to the community. Programs that embrace cultural and linguistic differences will serve to enrich the entire student body. Support for ongoing training and professional development for all teachers, as well as increased support for programs that recruit and train bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) certified educators is essential. The integration of these students into the system requires improved access to Title I funding and other grant programs targeting Latino student populations. New applicants and community-based organizations (CBOs) should also have fair access and the ability to compete for program funds and act as primary fiscal agents.

**Expand Outreach to Latino Youth and their Parents to Create a Support System Regarding the Importance of Higher Education.**

Leaders in higher education and elected representatives need to support and become involved in an awareness campaign to increase the numbers of young Latinos who not only stay in school, but go on to institutions of higher education. There is an urgent need for the following:

- Training and collaboration of parent, public school teachers, and university officials to "College Team" guide Latino students from K-12 for college bound preparation.
- Hold colleges and universities to their commitment to diversity by hiring faculty and staff that accurately reflect the communities in which they reside.
- Mandatory institutional educational summits to develop Latino education action plans.
- Create an all-out effort for drop-out intervention, a system to track and recruit drop-outs to return and complete their education by supporting programs like TRIO programs and community-based organizations such as the LULAC National Education Service Centers (LNESEC), which provides outreach to children who have left their schools.

**Hold Elected Officials and Government Agencies Accountable.** In developing the No Child Left Behind Act, President Bush and Congress promised to invest the resources necessary so that schools and students would have the tools to meet new expectations for achievement. These officials should likewise be held accountable to their promise to ensure that schools are able to meet the needs of all children.



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