pre[k]now

Pre-K Now
Research Series

July 2006

Pre-K and Latinos: The Foundation for America's Future

Eugene E. Garcia, Ph.D.
Arizona State University
College of Education
Tempe, AZ

Danielle M. Gonzales, M.Ed.
Pre-K Now
Washington, DC

www.preknow.org

Pre-K Now
1025 F Street, NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC
20004
202.862.9871 voice
202.862.9870 fax
www.preknow.org

pre[k]now

July 2006

Dear Colleagues,

Latinos* are the largest minority group and the most rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population. The future productivity of the nation's workforce depends, in large part, on their success. By providing high-quality pre-kindergarten programs that effectively serve *all* children, especially those from this quickly growing segment of the population, states can improve the economic outlook for both their Latino populations and their citizenry as a whole.

Unfortunately, Hispanic youngsters often start school less prepared than white children and do not catch up during the primary grades. The much-discussed "achievement gap" between Latino students and their non-Latino peers actually begins before children even enter kindergarten and persists throughout the K-12 years. However, Hispanic families strongly value education. In fact, a recent survey shows that 97 percent of Latino parents would enroll their child if high-quality pre-k were available in their communities.[1]

It is imperative that policymakers and advocates understand how Hispanic children fare academically compared to their peers and become familiar with the programs, practices, and policies that promote Latino children's educational and life success. *Pre-K and Latinos: The Foundation for America's Future* provides policymakers and educators with critical data to support those efforts.

While many states have a history of providing pre-k to children at risk of academic failure due to low income or other family characteristics, both research and practice demonstrate that providing pre-k for all is the most effective way to reach Latino children, narrow the Latino participation gap, and address existing disparities in school readiness, achievement, and attainment.

Researchers, early childhood educators, and advocates have learned a great deal over the last decade. Based upon the extensive body of research on early childhood development, bilingualism, socioeconomics, and the value of high-quality pre-k-for-all programs, this report explores the policies and practices that Pre-K Now believes will best serve our nation's growing Latino population. We are committed to Latino access to and involvement in pre-k-for-all efforts as an important element in realizing high-quality pre-k that is truly for all.

Sincerely,

Libby Doggett

Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Pre-K Now

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

Pre-K and Latinos: The Foundation for America's Future

The Latino population in the United States is growing at a rapid pace, and the proportion of our nation's under-five year olds who are Latino is increasing even faster. Many of these children lack access to the high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences that promote academic achievement and future success.

By providing Latino children with culturally and linguistically appropriate services in high-quality, pre-k-for-all programs, educators and policymakers can help close the achievement gap and make a major contribution to realizing this growing population's remarkable potential.

Introduction

Across the nation, policymakers at all levels of government are making substantial new commitments to pre-kindergarten. In fiscal year 2006 alone, state pre-k investments increased by more than $600 million.[2] While these investments are welcome, states must also do more to ensure that the pre-k programs they are creating now serve the needs of the pre-k populations of both today and tomorrow. To be truly effective, pre-k-for-all systems must be both high in quality and designed to serve ever more ethnically and linguistically diverse child populations.

The benefits, for our country as a whole, are compelling. Hispanics are now the largest minority segment of the national population, and the proportion of Latinos among the nation's children is expected to grow rapidly for decades to come. Therefore, finding ways to raise Hispanic academic achievement is of pressing importance. Indeed, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal government's education reform act, has focused the attention of policymakers, school leaders, and communities on closing the achievement gap between whites and other ethnic groups, including Latinos. Providing Hispanics with much greater access to high-quality pre-k is critical to helping states meet the standards and mandates of NCLB.

To maximize the benefits of increased Latino participation in pre-k, programs should be structured to build upon the existing strengths within Latino communities, including strong family bonds, a high value on educational achievement, and widespread support for public education and social systems. *La familia* is a fundamental aspect of Latino life. Hispanics benefit from high levels of family support, networking, and cohesion. This is important because research has found that "familialism" may improve physical and mental health and educational outcomes, offsetting some of the adverse consequences of poverty.

Latinos also consistently cite education as their top public policy concern.[3] In fact, *educación* refers not only to formal education but, more broadly, to the development of the whole person as a member of their community. To be *bien educado*, which translates as "well behaved," is a direct reflection on the family as a whole and is considered quite an honor. Latinos also tend to have a strong degree of *confianza* – or trust – in the educational system, in teachers, and in community leaders. Latinos often view teachers as role models, mentors, and advisors both in the classroom and throughout the community.

Finally, any discussion of Latinos and early education must address the role of bilingualism in the changing world economy. A review of the research indicates that bilingual children often have higher levels of academic achievement. Further, research has shown that bilingualism can be beneficial for children's early language and literacy development, for family communication and function, and for children's feelings of self-worth.[4] When bilingualism is properly understood and nurtured, it can be a gift and not a deficit.

Latino children are a population on the rise, both in numbers and in economic importance to our nation. By recognizing and addressing their specific strengths and needs when building pre-k-for-all systems, states can begin to reduce poverty levels, improve educational achievement, and build opportunities for all children.

Pre-K Standards for English Language Learners: A Work In Progress

Many states have attempted to address pre-k standards for English Language Learners (ELLs) by translating their existing standards into other languages, but they provide little guidance to teachers or others using the standards as to how ELLs' individual circumstances can or should be accommodated.[5] Only **Texas** has standards that specifically address the needs of ELLs. Pre-k programs receive additional funding to provide students with English as a Second Language (ESL) services. The education code states that each school with 20 or more Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the same grade level must offer a bilingual education program. In those instances where there are fewer than 20 students, districts must provide LEP students with ESL instruction.[6]

Demographics: Growth of the Young Hispanic Population

The nation's Hispanic population increased by nearly 60 percent in the last decade, compared with an increase of 13 percent for the total U.S. population.[7] This growth has been even more marked among children. Between 1980 and 2004, the proportion of children under 18 years of age who were Hispanic more than doubled, and it is projected to reach 24 percent – or nearly a quarter of our nation's children – by 2020.

Of particular import for early childhood education, the Hispanic proportion of the nation's children younger than five is even larger than that of the under-18 group as a whole. Currently, about 21 percent of children under age five in the U.S. are Hispanic. In 2003, 22 percent of the babies born in the United States had Hispanic mothers, up from 15 percent in 1990.[8] This last statistic has significant and immediate implications for policymakers and educators, because children born in 2003 are now reaching the age at which they need access to high-quality pre-k programs.

Table 1: Percentage Growth of Latino Population in Southern States, 1990-2000

State	Percentage Increase
North Carolina	394%
Georgia	300%
South Carolina	211%
Arkansas	337%
Tennessee	278%
Alabama	208%

Source: Rakesh Kochhar, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya, "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth," (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).

Consistent with these birth figures, the vast majority of young Hispanic children are American citizens, though most have at least one immigrant parent. Greater than 90 percent of Hispanic children under five are U.S. citizens. However, it is important to note that, according to the 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe*, citizenship status is not a permissible basis for denying access to public education. Therefore, pre-k-for-all systems should be available to all children whose parents wish them to participate, regardless of citizenship status.

Historically, Hispanics have been concentrated in a small number of states. As recently as 2003, half of the Hispanic babies born in this country were in just two states – California and Texas – and about 75 percent were born in only eight states (AZ, CA, FL, IL, NJ, NM, NY, and TX). While Latinos are still fairly concentrated geographically, they are rapidly becoming a substantial presence across the country. In 25 states and the District of Columbia, at least 10 percent of the new babies born are Hispanic. Perhaps surprisingly, over the last 10 years, the largest percentage increases in Latino population have occurred in the South. (See Table 1.)

Underlying the growth of the Latino population in the South was an unusually strong regional economy between 1990 and 2000. During that period, several counties in the South bucked national unemployment trends by adding jobs in the manufacturing, construction, and service sectors. The prospect of work drew large numbers of Hispanics to the area, and as their numbers and prosperity have increased, their families have also grown. The demands these new Latinos make on public services continue to increase but so too do their contributions to the tax bases supporting those services.[9]

Socioeconomics and Pre-K

Latino Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Academic Impacts

The economic conditions of Latinos tend to be less favorable than those of whites. Hispanics tend to have higher rates of unemployment and to earn less, and they are more likely to live in poverty. Such economic disadvantages have been shown to directly impact educational success.

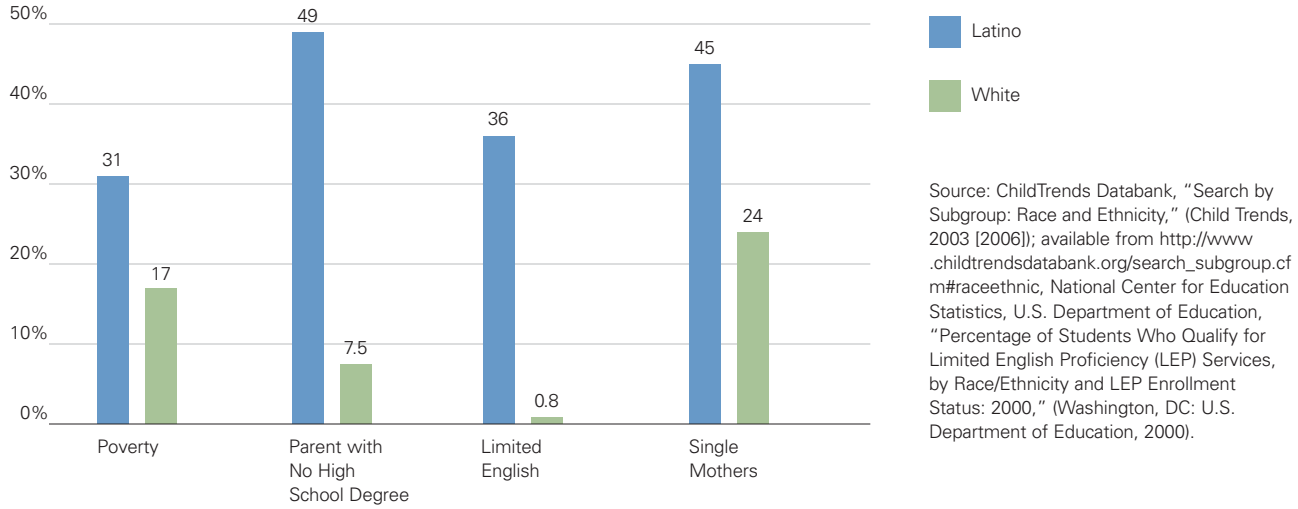
Researchers have identified certain socioeconomic factors correlated with relatively low levels of school readiness at the start of kindergarten and, subsequently, with low academic achievement over the K-12 years.[10] These factors – which include living in poverty, having a mother with less than a high school education, living in single-parent families, and not having English as the primary language spoken in the home – are used to identify those children who are most "at risk" for academic failure or difficulty. As Figure 1 illustrates, Latinos are much more likely to be educationally at risk than their white peers.

Pre-K's Impact on SES and Academics

Research on early education has shown that the most disadvantaged children tend to make the greatest gains as a result of pre-k participation. While no extensive study of Latino pre-k participation exists, other studies have found that all young children who attend pre-k learn language, social skills, and practical skills that enhance their chances for future achievement. The educational boost that pre-k provides is particularly important for the 22 percent of Hispanic families that are poor according to federal guidelines.[11]

These findings should compel states to ensure access to pre-k programs for Latino families; targeting is not enough. Efforts to improve pre-k access should be concentrated on specific outreach to meet the needs of the many Hispanic children who are at risk. Hispanic families consistently indicate that they want their children to succeed in school, and Hispanic parents are strongly supportive of efforts to expand the availability of high-quality pre-k to their children, because of the academic advantages that pre-k provides.

Figure 1: Risk Factors for Academic Failure Among Latinos and Whites



Source: ChildTrends Databank, "Search by Subgroup: Race and Ethnicity," (Child Trends, 2003 [2006]); available from http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/search_subgroup.cfm#raceethnic, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, "Percentage of Students Who Qualify for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Services, by Race/Ethnicity and LEP Enrollment Status: 2000," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Latino School Readiness, Academic Achievement, and Pre-K

The School Readiness Gap

A recent study, funded by the federal government, is following a national sample of children from the start of kindergarten through the fifth grade.[12] The study has found that Hispanic students entered kindergarten with less competence than whites in foundational mathematics and reading knowledge and skills. For example, in the fall of their kindergarten year, 75 percent of the white children could recognize letters, while only about half of the Hispanic children could do so. Hispanics also were less likely to be among the small group of children who had more advanced reading or math skills at the start of kindergarten. For instance, while 3 percent of the white children could sight read words, only 1 percent of the Hispanic youngsters could do so. Similarly, although 5 percent of whites could add and subtract at the start of kindergarten, the same was true for only 2 percent of Hispanics.

By the end of first grade, both Hispanic and white children in the study had made great progress in reading and math. In the process, some gaps in initial skills that were present at the start of kindergarten had largely disappeared, e.g., virtually all Hispanics and whites could recognize the letters. However, Hispanics were lagging in acquiring other skills that are essential in early reading and math development, such as being able to recognize words in context and to multiply and divide. Having started behind, the Hispanic children were having difficulty catching up in certain key areas.

At age five, even English-proficient Latino children are typically about three months behind white children in their pre-reading skills. In the fourth grade, Latino children are still scoring lower than white children in reading. Approximately 80 percent of this fourth-grade achievement gap is a direct consequence of the three-month delay observed upon entry into kindergarten.[13]

SES differences between whites and Hispanics were a major contributing factor to the early differences in literacy skills and knowledge of mathematics concepts. For example, 41 percent of the Hispanic children were in the lowest SES quintile of the sample, compared to just 9 percent of whites; and 28 percent of the white children were in the highest quintile compared to only 7 percent of the Hispanic youngsters.[14]

It is important to note that about 29 percent of the Hispanic youngsters in the sample were excluded from the English assessment at the start of kindergarten because of their limited knowledge of spoken English. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the differences in English-based literacy skills between Hispanic and white children at the start of kindergarten were considerably larger even than these data show.

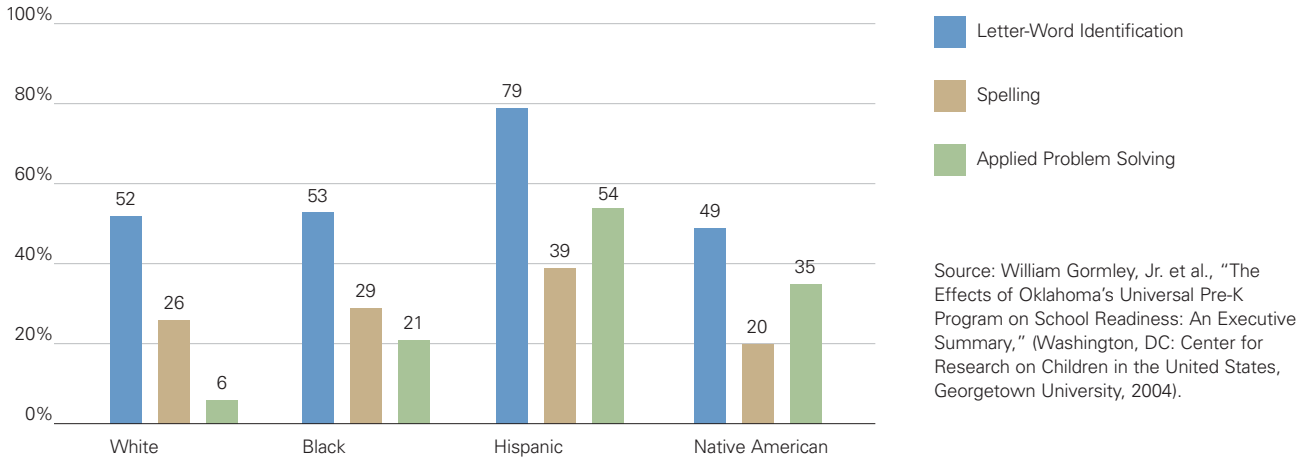
School Readiness Benefits of Pre-K

Solid empirical evidence from some model pre-k programs shows that high-quality pre-k can contribute to meaningful improvements in school readiness, which, in turn, can foster valuable, long-term improvements in educational outcomes. A study by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) found that children who participated in high-quality pre-k demonstrated gains of 85 percent in print awareness, a key pre-reading indicator.[15] The best model programs have documented benefits into adulthood as well.

The evaluation of Tulsa, Oklahoma's pre-k-for-all program found benefits for all racial, ethnic, and SES groups. As Figure 2 shows, the gains for Hispanic students are especially impressive. Specifically, Hispanic students experienced a 79 percent gain in letter-word identification (compared to 52 percent for whites), a 39 percent gain in spelling (compared to 26 percent for whites), and a 54 percent gain in applied problem solving (compared to 6 percent for whites). These figures dramatically outpace the gains that naturally occur during one year of a child's development.[16]

In discussing possible reasons for the gains provided by Oklahoma's state-funded pre-k program, the evaluators noted that teacher-education requirements for the program are high: every lead teacher is required to have at least a bachelor's degree, pre-k teachers are paid the same salaries as elementary and secondary teachers, and the pre-k classrooms observed by the evaluators tended to emphasize developmentally appropriate instruction.

Figure 2: Academic Gains of Children in Tulsa, OK Pre-K-for-All Program



Source: William Gormley, Jr. et al., "The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K Program on School Readiness: An Executive Summary," (Washington, DC: Center for Research on Children in the United States, Georgetown University, 2004).

Latino School Readiness, Academic Achievement, and Pre-K

continued from page 7

Latino Academic Achievement

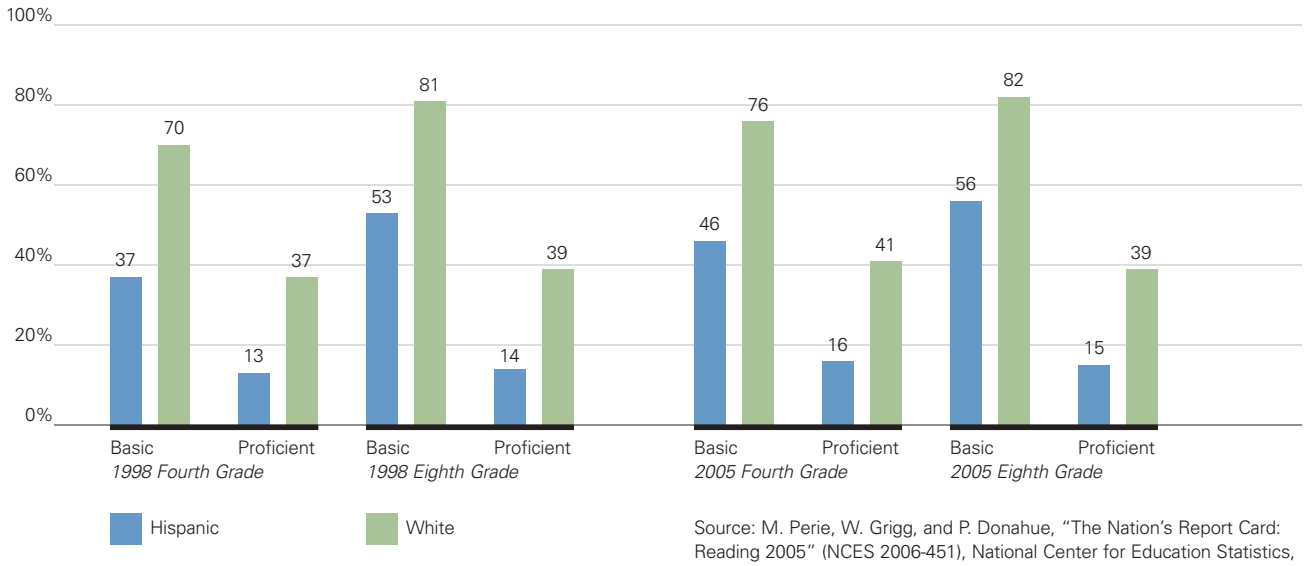
Consistent with the large gaps in school readiness, Hispanic students achieve, on average, at much lower levels than non-Hispanic whites in nearly all subject areas from the beginning of elementary school through the secondary level and into higher education. Relative to whites, Latinos are also severely overrepresented among low-achieving students and similarly underrepresented among high achievers.

The federal government's National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is one of the best sources of ongoing information about achievement differences between Hispanics and whites. Overall, Hispanic students consistently perform below the national average. By age nine, Hispanic students generally lag well behind whites in reading, mathematics, and science proficiency.

In 2005, only about 16.5 percent of Hispanic fourth graders were Proficient in reading as compared to 40 percent of whites, and by eighth grade, only 14 percent of Hispanics were able to attain a Proficient reading level, versus 40 percent of whites. (See Figure 3.) This means that many fewer Hispanics than whites have the strong reading comprehension skills needed to do well in the upper elementary years and to succeed in a high school college-preparatory curriculum.

Similarly, in 2005 nearly 67 percent of Hispanic fourth graders scored at the Basic level in math as compared to 90 percent of whites. By eighth grade, those figures were 12.5 percent and 40 percent at the Proficient level, respectively. (See Figure 4.) These figures suggest that Hispanics continue to be heavily underrepresented among students who are well prepared for a solid college preparatory math sequence in high school.

Figure 3: NAEP Fourth- and Eighth-Grade Reading Assessments, 1998 and 2005



Source: M. Perie, W. Grigg, and P. Donahue, "The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2005" (NCES 2006-451), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006).

Hispanic students did make significant gains of almost 17 percent in fourth-grade Basic math achievement and 13 percent in eighth-grade Proficient math achievement between 1996 and 2005. However, corresponding improvements among white students of 20 percent and 17 percent, respectively, during the same period mean that the gap with whites at the Basic level closed only slightly, while the gap actually grew at the Proficient level.[17]

Academic Achievement Benefits of Pre-k

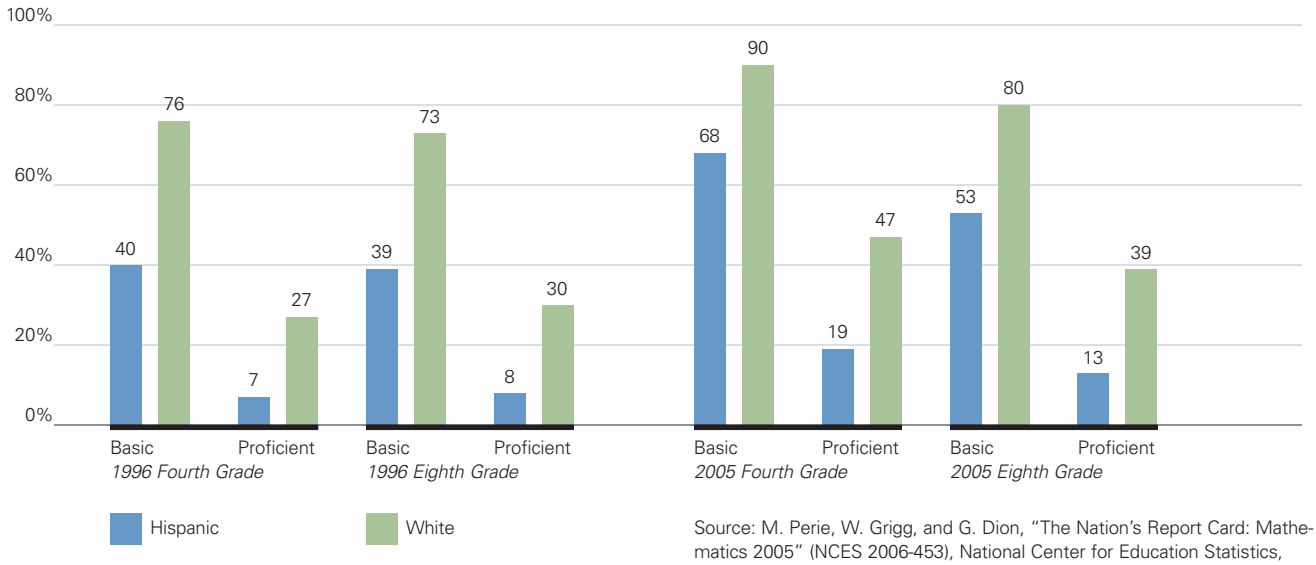
Over the past decade, one of the primary ways in which many states have sought to raise student achievement has been to increase investments in high-quality pre-k. A total of 40 states now fund some form of pre-k, and 23 governors and the mayor of the District of Columbia recommended increasing funding for pre-k in fiscal year 2007.[18] As the data on school readiness discussed earlier demonstrate, K-12 achievement gaps have many of their origins in gaps in school readiness as children enter kindergarten.

According to the NIEER study, children who attended high-quality pre-k programs scored 31 percent higher in vocabulary testing than their peers who did not attend pre-k. This finding is particularly important for future academic achievement, because vocabulary is "strongly predictive of general cognitive abilities and later reading success."[19]

Further, research indicates that participation in high-quality pre-k increases high school graduation rates by as much as 29 percent, reduces grade retention rates by 44 percent, and improves standardized test scores in both reading and math.[20]

These findings mean that high-quality pre-k can help mitigate many of the academic problems Latino children commonly face. By addressing these problems early, Latino children's academic achievement and socioeconomic conditions should improve generally.

Figure 4: NAEP Fourth- and Eighth-Grade Mathematics Assessment, 1996 and 2005



Source: M. Perie, W. Grigg, and G. Dion, "The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2005" (NCES 2006-453), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006).

High-Quality Pre-K Access and Enrollment among Hispanics

Limits on Latino Access and Enrollment

Latinos have much to gain from securing greater access to high-quality pre-k programs. Further, there is a growing awareness within the Hispanic community that pre-k can improve educational achievement. Despite these facts, many fewer Hispanics actually enroll in pre-k than other groups. Currently, only 40 percent of three-to-five-year-old Hispanics attend pre-k compared to about 60 percent of whites and African Americans.[21] Latinos' low rates of participation have frequently been misinterpreted as "reluctance" to place their children in center-based pre-k programs. However, availability of high-quality, publicly funded programs is frequently limited in Latino communities, reducing access and, thus, enrollment. Further, private programs are often too expensive or unavailable.[22]

When they do enroll in pre-k, Latino children are more likely than their non-Hispanic peers to attend low-quality pre-k programs: those with less-prepared teachers, less student diversity, fewer resources, higher teacher-to-child ratios, and larger class sizes. In addition, a lack of community outreach means that, even where high-quality, public programs do exist, many parents are not aware of the services that are available. Similarly, language can be a barrier to enrollment. Parents need to be able to communicate with the center, fill out forms, and engage with the teacher.

Community Outreach: Building Awareness, Growing Enrollment

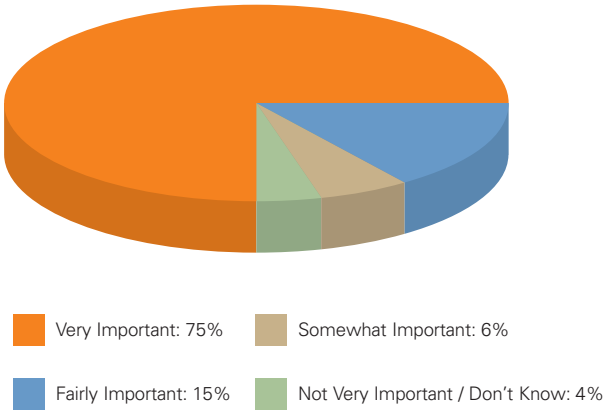
The number of children eligible to enroll in **Arkansas's** high-quality pre-k program jumped 140 percent after lawmakers pumped in millions of dollars – $40 million in 2004 and another $20 million in 2005. This made the state pre-k program available in all 75 Arkansas counties. Despite the influx of funds, advocates, state officials, and business leaders knew that some of the children who would benefit most from the program would likely not access it, simply because they were unaware of new services. So, the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, Tyson Foods, and the Entergy Corporation joined together to finance the production of 50,000 brochures and posters, plus radio announcements in both English and Spanish, to recruit eligible families to enroll their children in the program.[24] These efforts, in addition to state agency outreach, resulted in approximately 7,000 additional children enrolling in the state's pre-k program.[25]

Targeted Programs and Latino Enrollment

Frequently, concerns about Latino and other minority achievement are met with proposals for targeted early education programs. However, the targeted programs in some states with high numbers of Hispanics – like Arizona California, and Texas – each meet only four of 10 quality benchmarks as identified by NIEER. Even when these targeted programs are well designed and well intentioned, they inevitably leave certain children, even among those they target, without access to high-quality services.

Most targeted state programs as well as the federal Head Start program determine eligibility on SES bases. As noted earlier, many Latinos fall within the eligibility guidelines of these programs. However, as the Latino population grows and expands to new states and new neighborhoods, adequate spaces are frequently not available in their communities. In general, targeted programs fail to serve all eligible children. In fact, even Head Start, reaches only about 35 percent of eligible children.[23]

Figure 5: Percentages of Hispanics Who Believe Pre-K is Important



Source: M.E. Zarate and P. Perez, "Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support," (Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2006).

Additionally, targeted programs often do not serve middle-income children. However, middle-income Hispanics also demonstrate measurable and significant gaps in school readiness and academic achievement as compared with their non-Hispanic peers. By excluding these middle-income children from pre-k programs, states essentially punish the very economic advancement they seek to encourage.

Benefits of Increased Latino Enrollment

A 2005 report in the *Future of Children* found that increased enrollment by Hispanic children in high-quality pre-k programs could generate measurable improvements in Hispanic school readiness and long-term academic achievement. According to the authors, "if Hispanic children's enrollment [in pre-k] rises from 40 percent to 60 percent to match that of white children … this amounts to closing between 6 percent and 26 percent of the [achievement] gap."[26]

Latino Demand for Pre-K

Opinion research and other indicators consistently show that Latino families value pre-k education and that they do so, on average, at a 15 percent higher rate than do other populations.[27] Indeed, there is reason to believe that if voluntary, state-funded pre-k for all were widely available, participation of Hispanic children would grow accordingly.

A recent national survey of Hispanic adults conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute and funded by Pre-K Now provides evidence for this conclusion. (See Figure 5.) The survey found that:

- Over 90 percent of Hispanics felt that it is very important or somewhat important for children to attend pre-k.
- 97 percent would send their children to publicly funded, voluntary pre-k if it were available in their community.
- 69 percent believe pre-k is an important priority for the government to address now.
- When asked what they regarded as strong arguments for the benefits of pre-k:
  - 85 percent of the respondents cited the capacity of pre-k to help children learn early literacy skills;
  - 80 percent cited the opportunity to acquire social skills;
  - 87 percent noted the capacity of pre-k to help children learn English and become prepared for kindergarten.[28]

Expanding and Improving Access to Pre-K for Hispanics

Serving English Language Learners

In striving to make high-quality, publicly funded pre-k available to more Hispanic children, probably the most challenging issue facing policymakers is how to provide services that are responsive to the needs of English language learners, especially those who have parents with little formal education. According to the Supreme Court's 1974 decision in *Lau v. Nichols*, states and municipalities are constitutionally obligated to provide non-English-speaking students with a "meaningful opportunity" to participate in public education programs. Therefore, policymakers and educators must address both the legal and educational requirements for ELLs.

Although there is still some controversy about how best to serve ELLs during the upper elementary and high school years – particularly regarding whether and how to use bilingual education – there is greater agreement about culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for children from birth to age five. Two rigorous reviews of the existing research by the National Research Council found that using children's first languages in educational activities can have positive impacts on their English skill development and school readiness and can help them learn the academic core curriculum as well.[29]

The goal of bilingual pre-k programs is to help young children develop their first language skills as fully as possible, while also helping them learn English. States and school districts have adopted a variety of approaches to educate their ELL pre-k children. In general there are three different types of programs for ELLs: first-language classrooms, bilingual classrooms, and English-language classrooms.

Creating Child-Centered Cooperation

The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), based in California and Texas, works to bring schools, parents, and communities together as equal partners in the education of every child from pre-k through high school. They work to ensure that Latino parents are familiar with and understand the roles of the various support staff at the school site, including counselors, nurses, Head Start providers, and parent liaisons. Parents are also introduced to and taught how to contact community agencies. Additionally, families are made aware of additional workshops and services in the community, including parenting classes, parent-teacher conferences, workshops, and English as a Second Language classes.

More research is needed to determine which types of programs are most effective with which types of children, in part, because of the difficulty of applying a one-size-fits-all model to educating ELLs, who vary widely on experiential, cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions. Yet, experts point to the need to move beyond mere program labels and toward identification of a set of program features that work best for children in a given community. Similarly, the National Research Council concluded that the issue rests not with a specific program model but in the quality of what teachers do in classrooms with ELLs: specifically, how well they use the curriculum and the intentionality of their social and instructional interactions with children.[30]

Building a Diverse Teacher Corps

The **New Jersey** Department of Human Services partnered with two leading Latino organizations on a bilingual-teacher-recruitment campaign. They conducted a series of job fairs across the state and went into Latino communities to assist potential teachers in meeting teacher certification requirements. They also disseminated press releases to Spanish newspapers, radio stations, and television stations and distributed Spanish flyers to local universities, businesses, schools, and churches. At **Arizona** State University, all new teacher candidates in the early education program are required to be able to communicate in Spanish or one of the indigenous languages of Arizona.

Latino Perspectives on Language and Pre-K Education

In the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute survey, respondents expressed concerns about language and community outreach that reflect the challenges faced by educators:

- 88 percent of the respondents said that a teacher or staff member in pre-k programs should be bilingual in order to communicate with non-English speaking parents.
- 85 percent thought it is very important that instruction and activities in pre-k are conducted both in English and Spanish throughout the day.
- 33 percent – the most on this topic – believed the primary reason that some Hispanic parents may not enroll their children in a pre-k program is that they do not know services are available in their communities.[32]

Most current pre-k staff lack training and professional development related to working with a culturally and linguistically diverse population, which hinders their ability to foster development of language-minority children. Therefore, a critical need exists to help more teachers and staff communicate effectively in Spanish with the children in their classrooms. A recent survey of early childhood education administrators reported that the lack of bilingual staff and the lack of training in serving diverse children is one of the most urgent challenges in serving Latinos.[31]

Another important communications challenge also exists for educators seeking to serve Latinos. Many parents speak little or no English. The need to inform Hispanic parents of the pre-k opportunities that may be available in their communities and to engage parents once their children are enrolled requires more Spanish literacy among administrators and classroom teachers.

Apart from the immediate need to improve the capacity of pre-k programs to communicate effectively with non-English-speaking Hispanic parents and children, the pre-k community has a longer-term need to develop better methods of assessing the developmental progress of Hispanic youngsters, both in Spanish and in English.

Encouragingly, a number of efforts to develop more effective pre-k strategies are being designed and tested with predominantly Latino student populations. Some of these strategies, such as implementation guidelines for New Jersey's Abbott pre-k program, are focusing on the specific ways that English and Spanish are used. Others, like Tulsa's program evaluation, are deliberately including large numbers of Hispanics, even when the specific focus is not on English-Spanish concerns. In addition, the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics was established in 2004 for the express purpose of identifying major educational challenges facing Hispanic children and making recommendations for action.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While Latinos are a rapidly growing population, they lack corresponding access to the high-quality early education experiences that will foster their achievement and educational success. Because Latino children are significantly underrepresented in high-quality pre-k programs, it is not enough to just expand access to existing programs. State leaders should pay particular attention to the extent to which expansion efforts are both increasing Hispanic participation in pre-k and improving the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of available programs. Pre-k expansion efforts should ensure that the supply of programs is sufficient to meet demand in communities with large and/or growing Hispanic populations. Additionally, substantial attention must be given to ensuring that Hispanic parents are informed about the availability of programs in their communities.

Policymakers, business leaders, parents, and advocates have the unique opportunity to call for a change in perspective, as well as in policy, with the goal of helping more Latino children graduate from high school, go to college, and become productive members of the workforce. The movement to establish free, voluntary pre-k for all must be increasingly responsive to the needs of Latino children and their families, even while continuing to be deeply concerned with meeting the needs of all children. To this end, the following policy solutions are strongly recommended:

Effective outreach – When asked whom they would turn to for information about pre-k, 52 percent of Latinos said the local elementary school while 26 percent simply did not know.[33] Clearly, meeting the needs of Latino children and families means providing complete, accurate, and readily available information about pre-k via messengers and media that Latinos know and trust. Community leaders such as teachers, other parents, and doctors are ideal resources for reaching Latino families where they live.[34] Providing information in both Spanish and English and in formats that are accessible to families with limited literacy also requires the use of non traditional outreach strategies such as television, radio, community newsletters, and direct communications through community-based organizations including churches and social-service agencies.

Home language – The research is clear: Pre-k programs should support the language and culture of all children and their families but especially language-minority children such as Hispanics. All classrooms can do simple things such as reading and displaying children's books in different languages; placing written labels on items in the room using various languages; giving simple commands or instructions in a language other than English; and providing opportunities for children to hear simple greetings, words, or phrases in a language other than their own (including sign language). However, states must do more to ensure that programs with large numbers of ELLs who speak the same home language provide instruction in this language either through the lead teacher or an assistant (unless parents request otherwise). Programs should also explicitly foster development of both children's first languages and English. While it is important that programs hire native Spanish speakers who are familiar with the students' cultures, it is also recommended that existing staff acquire Spanish-language skills. Program staff should value bilingualism and bi-literacy as beneficial for both ELLs and for society.

Bilingual Staff – Development and retention of a highly qualified, bilingual workforce is essential to any effort to effectively serve Latino children and families. Ninety-three percent of Hispanics believe it is very important to have pre-k teachers who are bilingual or can effectively communicate in Spanish.[35] States should work with colleges and universities as well as program providers to cultivate and appropriately train the needed teacher corps. Aggressive teacher recruitment within Latino communities should be coupled with technical assistance, flexible scheduling, mentoring, and scholarships. Veteran teachers should also be supported. Pre-k teachers want all the children in their classes to succeed, but many are not trained in teaching young children who are learning multiple languages simultaneously. Some teachers and aides are in need of professional development around the latest research in this expanding field. Additional resources and incentives should be offered to colleges and universities to encourage bilingual and multicultural early education training and capacity building.

Parent involvement – States should strive to engage Latino families in children's early education and to leverage the valuable learning resources that they possess. Opportunities for parents to participate in program development, advocacy and leadership, and in-class activities should supplement parent-teacher conferences and other child-specific interactions. Parent-involvement efforts must be designed to accommodate Latino families' unique circumstances, with particular consideration for non-English speakers and extended-family homes, including translation of all written material and hiring of bilingual staff and/or interpreters to assist with parent outreach. States can offer preference in awarding pre-k contracts, provide financial and other incentives, or simply require that providers reach out to Latino families and create family-involvement plans that engage families of ELLs and help build Latino enrollment.

Enrollment requirements – Despite the strong support for pre-k within Latino communities, barriers to program participation continue to limit Hispanic enrollment. Many programs require that families document employment, income, or citizenship or provide Social Security numbers, and paperwork is often available only in English.[36] States should evaluate and remove any barriers in their program requirements that are likely to deter Latino enrollment. It is illegal to deny students access to pre-k on the basis of citizenship, immigration status, or alleged legal status. Programs and policymakers should, therefore, focus on building capacity and services that can improve educational and economic outcomes for Latinos.

Research – Latinos have not been included as a sample in any of the longitudinal studies such as the well-known Perry High/Scope and Carolina Abecedarian studies. Similarly, the national Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) only looks at English-dominant children; there is not yet a data source on Spanish-dominant Latino children. When developing the evaluation component of state pre-k programs, states should establish appropriate outcome and accountability measures to assess how well programs are providing services to all children, with a particular focus on first-language development and second-language acquisition. Assessments should also include a diverse population among the sample.

Conclusions and Recommendations

continued from page 15

Local resources – States should leverage existing networks of Hispanic-serving, community-based organizations that provide bilingual information about government-supported early childhood programs. These organizations can help connect families with the best programs for their children and their particular situations.

Curricula – Curriculum developers across the country are beginning to consult with experts in second-language acquisition and culturally appropriate practices to develop new pre-k curricula to serve the changing child population. States should adopt at least one bilingual or Spanish-language curriculum for their pre-k programs. When considering different pre-k curricula, states should ensure that reviewers are aware of and culturally responsive to various ethnic groups in their state. State departments of education should appoint experts on second-language acquisition and Latino culture to their review boards and keep up to date as new curricula are developed and tested.

Diverse delivery – All families need a variety of options for full-day, half-day, workday, and/or wrap-around services that meet their schedules and are provided by people/organizations that they can communicate with and trust. This is especially true of Latino families and recent immigrants. State and local communities should work together to offer high-quality educational experiences in all settings, including public schools, family childcare homes, faith-based and other private childcare centers, and Head Start, as long as all programs meet quality standards.

Eligibility criteria – Despite overwhelming evidence of the importance of pre-k for ELL children, many states – primarily because of budget constraints – still target their pre-k programs to low-income children and children with disabilities. Only 12 states currently treat all ELL children as eligible for pre-k.[37] In states where pre-k eligibility is limited, policymakers and program administrators should expand their definitions of eligibility to include children with limited English proficiency. Of course, this should be viewed as an intermediate step, intended to encourage greater Latino participation and to serve more at-risk children while states work toward the larger goal of providing pre-k for all children.

The very young Latino population in the U.S. is growing rapidly and will soon equal 25 percent of the nation's under-five year olds. Based on what we know from the research on children's brain development and given these demographic projections, high-quality pre-k can no longer be considered a luxury reserved for upper-income families or a public-assistance program for the disadvantaged. Rather, it is an essential part of the education continuum, just as necessary as kindergarten or first grade, that provides a solid educational foundation and promotes school success. It is in the best interest of our states and our country that young Latinos – indeed, that all children – receive a high-quality pre-k experience.


Maria

Endnotes

1 M.E. Zarate and P. Perez, "Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support," (Los Angeles: Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2006).

2 Pre-K Now, "Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2006," (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2005).

3 Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, "National Survey of Latinos: Education - Summary and Chartpack," (Washington, DC: The Pew Hispanic Center and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

4 Patton O. Tabors, *One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Preschool Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language*, paperback ed. (Baltimore: Brookes, 1997).

5 Catherine Scott-Little, Sharon L. Kagan, and Victoria S. Frelow, "Creating the Conditions for Success with Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Study of State-Level Standards for Children's Learning Prior to Kindergarten," *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 5, no. 2 (2003).

6 "Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines," (Texas Education Agency, 1999).

7 "The Hispanic Population: Census 2000 Brief," U.S. Census Bureau (2001).

8 E. E. Garcia and S. Miller, "Strengthening Preschool/ Pre-K Education for the Diverse Hispanic Population in the United States," in *NAEYC 15th Annual Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development* (San Antonio, TX: 2007).

9 National Immigration Forum, "Economy: Immigrants and the Economy," (National Immigration Forum, 2005 [2006]); available from http://www.immigrationforum.org/DesktopDefault .aspx?tabid=179.

10 Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen, "Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation among Immigrant Families," (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2006).

11 U.S. Census Bureau, "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004," Report P60, no. 229, Table B-2, 52-7 (2004).

12 K. Denton and J. West, "Children's Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade," U.S. Department of Education (Washington, DC: 2002).

13 M. Bridges et al., "Preschool for California's Children: Promising Benefits, Unequal Access. Policy Brief 04-3," (Berkeley, Davis, Palo Alto, and Santa Barbara: Policy Analysis for California Education and the University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2004).

14 Denton and West, "Children's Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade."

15 W. Steven Barnett, Lamy, Cynthia, and Jung, Kwanghee, "The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States," (National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University, 2005).

16 William Gormley, Jr. et al., "The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K Program on School Readiness: An Executive Summary," (Washington, DC: Center for Research on Children in the United States, Georgetown University, 2004).

17 M. Perie, W. Grigg, and G. Dion, "The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2005" (NCES 2006-453), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006).

18 Pre-K Now, "Leadership Matters: Governors' Pre-K Proposals Fiscal Year 2007," (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2006).

19 Barnett, "The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States."

20 Walter S. Gilliam and Edward F. Zigler, "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Prekindergarten: 1977 to 2003," (New Haven: Yale University Child Study Center, 2004); Arthur Reynolds, *Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

21 National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, "The Condition of Education 2002" (NCES 2002-025), Table 1-1, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002).

22 M. Bridges and B. Fuller, "Access of Hispanics to Center-Based Programs for 3- to 4-Year Olds and Infants and Toddlers," Policy Analysis for California Education, (unpublished analysis for the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics).

References

[23] J. Currie, "A Fresh Start for Head Start?," in *Children's Roundtable* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001).

[24] Cynthia Howell, "Funds Swell Prekindergarten Low-Income Enrollment up 140 Percent after Money Added," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Feb. 19, 2006.

[25] J. Doctors, "Leadership Profile: Hugh McDonald," (Pre-K Now, 2005); available from http://www.preknow.org/community/profiles/mcdonald.cfm.

[26] Katherine A. Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel, "Early Childhood Care and Education: Effects on Ethnic and Racial Gaps in School Readiness," *The Future of Children: School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps* 15, no. 1 (2005).

[27] Peter D. Hart Research Associates, "Voters' Attitudes toward Pre-K " (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2005).

[28] Zarate and Perez, "Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support."

[29] National Research Council, *Educating Language-Minority Children*, ed. Diane August and Kenji Hakuta (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1998).

[30] Ibid.

[31] V. Buysse, Castro, D. C., West, T., & Skinner, M. L., "Addressing the Needs of Latino Children: A National Survey of State Administrators of Early Childhood Programs. Executive Summary," (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2004).

[32] Zarate and Perez, "Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support."

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Matthews and Ewen, "Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation among Immigrant Families."

[37] W. Steven Barnett, Hustedt, Jason T., Robin, Kenneth B, and Schulman, Karen L., "The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook," (New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006), 176 & 203-13.

Barnett, W. Steven, Hustedt, Jason T., Robin, Kenneth B, and Schulman, Karen L. "The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook." 222. New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006.

Barnett, W. Steven, Lamy, Cynthia, and Jung, Kwanghee. 2005. "The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States." National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

Bridges, M., and B. Fuller. "Access of Hispanics to Center-Based Programs for 3- to 4-Year Olds and Infants and Toddlers." Policy Analysis for California Education, (unpublished analysis for the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics).

Bridges, M., B. Fuller, R. Rumberger, and L. Tran. "Preschool for California's Children: Promising Benefits, Unequal Access. Policy Brief 04-3." Berkeley, Davis, Palo Alto, and Santa Barbara: Policy Analysis for California Education and the University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2004.

Buysse, V., Castro, D. C., West, T., & Skinner, M. L. "Addressing the Needs of Latino Children: A National Survey of State Administrators of Early Childhood Programs. Executive Summary." 146-63. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2004.

ChildTrends Databank. 2003. "Search by Subgroup: Race and Ethnicity." Child Trends, http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/search_subgroup.cfm#raceethnic. (accessed 2006).

Currie, J. "A Fresh Start for Head Start?" In *Children's Roundtable*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001.

Denton, K., and J. West. "Children's Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade." U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2002.

Doctors, J. 2005. "Leadership Profile: Hugh McDonald." Pre-K Now, http://www.preknow.org/community/profiles/mcdonald.cfm.

Garcia, E. E., and S. Miller. "Strengthening Preschool/Pre-K Education for the Diverse Hispanic Population in the United States." In *NAEYC 15th Annual Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development*. San Antonio, TX, 2007.

References

continued from page 19

Gilliam, Walter S., and Edward F. Zigler. "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Prekindergarten: 1977 to 2003." New Haven: Yale University Child Study Center, 2004.

Gormley, William, Jr., Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson. "The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K Program on School Readiness: An Executive Summary." Washington, DC: Center for Research on Children in the United States, Georgetown University, 2004.

Howell, Cynthia. "Funds Swell Prekindergarten Low-Income Enrollment up 140 Percent after Money Added." *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Feb. 19, 2006.

Kochhar, Rakesh, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya. "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth." Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005.

Magnuson, Katherine A., and Jane Waldfogel. "Early Childhood Care and Education: Effects on Ethnc and Racial Gaps in School Readiness." *The Future of Children: School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps* 15, no. 1 (2005): 169-96.

Matthews, Hannah, and Danielle Ewen. "Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation Among Immigrant Families." Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2006.

National Immigration Forum. 2005. "Economy: Immigrants and the Economy." National Immigration Forum, http://www.immigrationforum.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=179. (accessed 2006).

National Research Council. *Educating Language-Minority Children*. Edited by Diane August and Kenji Hakuta. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1998.

Perie, M., W. Grigg, and G. Dion. "The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2005" (NCES 2006-453). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006.

Perie, M., W. Grigg, and P. Donahue. "The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2005" (NCES 2006-451). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006.

Peter D. Hart Research Associates. "Voters' Attitudes toward Pre-K". Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2005.

Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation. "National Survey of Latinos: Education - Summary and Chartpack." Washington, DC: The Pew Hispanic Center and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004.

Pre-K Now. "Leadership Matters: Governors' Pre-K Proposals Fiscal Year 2007." Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2006.

———. "Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2006." Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2005.

"Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines." Texas Education Agency, 1999.

Reynolds, Arthur. *Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Scott-Little, Catherine, Sharon L. Kagan, and Victoria S. Frelow. "Creating the Conditions for Success with Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Study of State-Level Standards for Children's Learning Prior to Kindergarten." *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 5, no. 2 (2003).

Tabors, Patton O. *One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Preschool Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language*. paperback ed. Baltimore: Brookes, 1997.

"The Hispanic Population: Census 2000 Brief." U.S. Census Bureau, 8, 2001.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004." Report P60, no. 229, 2004.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. "Percentage of Students Who Qualify for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Services, by Race/Ethnicity and LEP Enrollment Status: 2000." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000.

———. "The Condition of Education 2002" (NCES 2002-025). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002.

Zarate, M.E., and P. Perez. "Latino Public Opinion Survey of Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Knowledge, Preferences, and Public Support." Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2006.

pre[k]now

Authors and Acknowledgements

Authors
Eugene E. Garcia, Ph.D. is dean and professor of education at Arizona State University's College of Education and also serves as the vice president for University-School Partnerships. In addition, he chairs the National Task Force on Early Education for Hispanics.

Danielle M. Gonzales, M.Ed. is deputy state program director at Pre-K Now. She also focuses on specific initiatives to educate policymakers and the public about culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Hispanic children and their families.

Acknowledgements
L. Scott Miller, Bryant Jensen, and Delis Cuéllar Klitzke provided the data collection and assisted on the early drafts of this report. Special thanks to Linda Espinosa, Ph.D., Aida Nevárez-La Torre, Ed.D., Sara Watson, Ph.D., the Center for Law and Social Policy, and staff from the National Council of La Raza for their contributions to this report. Thank you to Jennifer V. Doctors, Libby Doggett, Ph.D., DeDe Dunevant, Dale Epstein, Trista Kendall, and Stephanie Rubin, J.D. of Pre-K Now for their expertise and assistance in all aspects of preparation of this report.

Many thanks to the staff, children, and families of the CentroNía pre-kindergarten program in Washington, D.C., where the photographs for this publication were taken. www.centronia.org

The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics is funded by the Foundation for Child Development.

Pre-K Now is a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and other funders to advance high-quality pre-k for all children. The findings and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Trusts.

Pre-K Now at a Glance

Mission
Pre-K Now collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement for high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds.

Vision
Pre-K Now's vision is a nation in which every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

Location
Washington, DC

Leadership
Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Media Contact
Don Owens
Senior Communications Manager
dowens@preknow.org
202.862.9863 voice
202.302.5928 mobile

Funders
The Pew Charitable Trusts
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
CityBridge Foundation
The Schumann Fund for New Jersey

Pre-K Now Key Differentiators
- Focuses exclusively on pre-k
- Provides the most up-to-date gauge of the pre-k pulse in any state
- Offers nationwide access to pre-k advocates
- Monitors and distributes daily pre-k newsclips
- Provides a national perspective on local pre-k issues
- Provides outreach, policy, and Spanish-language information targeted to the Latino community
- Leads a national movement which has gained significant momentum in the last five years

The Case for Pre-K
- Pre-k benefits all children academically, socially, and emotionally.
- High-quality pre-k for all nets a high return on investment in children and the community.
- The most important brain development occurs by age five.
- Pre-k is the first step to improving K-12 education.

pre[k]now

Pre-K Now

1025 F Street, NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC
20004

202.862.9871 voice
202.862.9870 fax

www.preknow.org

Pre-K and Latinos: The Foundation for America's Future