

## **LATINO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION POLICY SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY**

**National Louis University  
122 S. Michigan Ave., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Atrium**

**March 12, 2009  
8:30am -12:30pm**

The Latino Early Care and Education Policy Symposium took place on Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in the second floor atrium at National-Louis University. 179 people RSVP'd for the event and approximately 135 people attended.

### Welcome & Introduction

Attendees were welcomed by Dr. Richard J. Pappas, President of National Louis University, who affirmed National-Louis University's tradition of education, commitment to early childhood education, and their spirit of collaboration. He was followed by Sylvia Puente, Executive Director of Latino Policy Forum. Ms. Puente thanked everyone for attending and discussed the significance of specifically addressing Latinos with respect to education and in particular early childhood education. She spoke about shifts in demographics, which have distributed Latinos throughout the state of Illinois. She discussed the critical need to better understand Latino families and to transform early learning in order to deliver appropriate services. Early childhood education is key to reducing the education achievement gap and preparing Latino students for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Latino student success is essential to ensuring the economic success of the region.

### Key Note Address

The audience was addressed by Dr. Eugene Garcia, Vice President of Educational Partnerships at Arizona State University and Chairman for the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics. Dr. Garcia gave an overview of some of the key research on Latinos in early childhood. As he blended research with personal experiences, he delivered a message about the importance of starting early, the role that knowledgeable educators play, the valuable asset that parents are to children and educational programs, and the value that bilingualism has in the world and how important it is for early childhood programs to appropriately nurture all of those assets. Dr. Garcia emphasized the importance of nurturing the native language by providing instruction in that language and exposing a child to the highest possible quality of both languages, differentiating between academic language and social language. He also emphasized the important correlation between high quality educators in the earliest years and educational and developmental outcomes. The audience then had the opportunity to ask Dr. Garcia some questions.

### Setting the Context:

Erika Beltran, from the National Council of La Raza, presented the report *Buenos Principios: Latino children in the earliest years*. She provided national demographics and contextualized some of the factors which impact child development and early education. Access to healthcare, maternal level of education, and poverty are some of those factors. Ms. Beltran then went on to make national policy recommendations. She urged increased support for Even Start, Head Start, and Early Head Start. She also promoted the State Children's Health Insurance Program and expanding coverage to immigrant children.

Reyna Hernandez, from Latino Policy Forum, presented the report *Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Young Latinos*. She provided Illinois, Latino demographics and contextualized them within the realm of early childhood education. Ms. Hernandez laid out issues of concern for Latinos in the implementation of early childhood programs and gave examples of effective practices utilized by local community-based providers to address those issues.

The presentations were followed by a question and answer session.

### Panel 1: Advocates and Practitioners:

Dr. Kathleen Sheridan, Department of Early Childhood Education Chairperson at National Louis University, moderated a session of advocates and practitioners, asking a series of questions to begin the dialogue.

Dr. Sheridan began by asking Celena Roldan, director of early childhood programs at Erie Neighborhood House, about some of the strategies utilized at Erie to ensure linguistically and culturally inclusive outreach efforts. Among the wide variety of practices, Erie Neighborhood House trains all of their staff, including teachers, therapists, psychologists, and intake staff, to work with families. Ms. Roldan described Erie's one-on-one approach to inform families about how to access services. Word-of-mouth has been Erie's primary means of recruiting new students.

Dr. Sheridan asked Clara Lopez, from El Valor, how her programs engage parents. Ms. Lopez expressed El Valor's recognition that parents are the most important teachers. El Valor also recognizes that many families have extended families and they offer engagement initiatives with extended family in mind. They aspire to offer parents meaningful experiences which will ensure that parents participate in programs. El Valor also teaches a parent curriculum, *Raising a Thinking Child*, which further develops the relationship between the parent, the school, and the child.

The moderator asked Ellen Chavez, Director of Early Childhood at Casa Central, how Casa Central makes use of the child's native language in the educational program. Casa Central has a long tradition of placing bilingual staff in classrooms. Ms. Chavez explained that Casa Central provides translation into Spanish of information sent home to parents. They have bilingual material in classrooms. Casa Central has now gone further to ensure not only access to bilingual

material, but also that children have full reading and literacy skills. The program also seeks to be deliberately aware of Latino community diversity. The local community has many differences amongst generations and also between different groups based on national origin. Casa Central recognizes that some Latino families are more comfortable communicating in English when they walk through the doors.

Nancy Shier, the Director of the Kids Public Education and Policy Project at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, was asked how issues of linguistic and cultural diversity are currently incorporated into the broader ECE public policy and advocacy agenda, as well as into the quality standards for ECE programs. Many of the public policy recommendations made by the Buenos Principios report have been key issues for the early childhood community, including expanding access to Early Head Start, health care, and childcare. Ms. Shier went on to express that Latinos and Latino Policy Forum also have a voice at many of the policy tables throughout the state, including the Quality Alliance and the Illinois Early Learning Council, particularly in the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee. As data has grown and developed, policy has also become better informed about Latino access to early childhood care and education. The policy advocates are now better able to target resources towards those high need areas.

The panel ended with a question and answer session.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Panel: Government Representatives:

The second panel consisted of government representatives from the state-wide and Chicago divisions which administer the Early Childhood Block Grant programs and the Child Care Assistance Program. The panel moderator was Ric Estrada, the executive director of Erie Neighborhood House.

Mr. Estrada began by asking Mary Ellen Caron, the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, about how we could approach creating structural changes to ensure that more programs implement good linguistically and culturally appropriate practices at the policy level. There is a need to make sure the demographics and the data about Latinos are widely disseminated in the public arena. Ms. Caron emphasized that we, as a society, also need to move away from a deficit-based model to an asset-based model, beginning with viewing Spanish as an asset that many children bring with them. Expanding and improving outreach, in addition to modifying the co-pay, will increase access to childcare. There is also a need for more collaboration between community organizations, government agencies, and the public.

He then asked Barbara Bowman, the Chief Officer of the Office of Early Childhood Education with Chicago Public Schools, about current ways CPS ensures that providers in schools and at community-based organizations offer linguistically and culturally competent services. She stated that the baseline within CPS is that all children have a right to understand their development and appreciate their community and their culture. Children who speak a language other than English are identified and put into classrooms with someone who speaks the language of a majority of the children, though some children are in situations where they have to speak English. Ms. Bowman explained that with respect to Spanish, most Spanish-speaking children have at least a Spanish-speaking aid in the classroom. Professional development is provided to teachers to give

them strategies for teaching English as a second language and for reinforcing the home-language at home; for example, teachers encourage families to speak Spanish at home. Classroom activities and materials also promote bilingual education. Some classrooms use bilingual curricula. There are also opportunities for professional development for bilingual individuals to become teachers or certified aids.

The moderator asked Linda Saterfield, Bureau Chief of the Bureau of Child Care and Development with the Illinois Department of Human Services, how agencies are collaborating and streamlining access to services and program standards, in light of the various early childhood funding streams. Both Ms. Saterfield and Kay Henderson, Early Childhood Division Administrator with the Illinois State Board of Education, responded to the question by stating their regular and ongoing communication with each other across divisions. In addition, there are official collaborations that cross agencies, such as the Head Start Collaboration Initiative and the process developing the Illinois State Learning Standards. In addition, stakeholder-driven initiatives are one way of helping inform administrative processes.

Ms. Henderson then answered a question about what current programs exist to develop a linguistically and culturally competent workforce within the Illinois State Board of Education. The Illinois Resource Center provides early childhood professional development in the area of bilingual education across the state. Other groups, like the Illinois Early Learning Council Committees, have played a major role in reshaping professional development requirements at the Illinois State Board of Education. ISBE is considering including coursework relevant to bilingual education in the preparation of principals and superintendents.

The panel ended with a question and answer session.

### Closing Remarks

Sylvia Puente, from the Latino Policy Forum, began her closing remarks by asking the audience what public policy changes are needed. Some of the audience comments included developing partnerships to voice the needs and disparities of Latino children and to include educators in decision-making processes. Ms. Puente thanked everyone who attended, who participated in the panels, and who supported the event and the advocacy efforts of Latino Policy Forum. She ended by inviting individuals to work with the Latino Policy Forum to develop strategies for moving forward an agenda in early childhood.