

June 22, 2010

HISPANIC STATE LEGISLATORS CALL FOR RENEWED ATTENTION TO MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Washington, DC The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) today released its second Closing Achievement Gaps report entitled, *English Language Acquisition and Middle School Preparation: Keys to Latino Educational Success*, focused on the continuing under-education of Hispanics in middle schools and those classified as English Language Learners (ELL). The paper, produced for NHCSL by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) under the direction of Dr. Harry Pachon, calls for attention to these two areas as the national community begins a conversation about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

"Urban and rural schools are continually more Latino, and more ELL. Therefore, we must focus on realizing high achievement for Latino students if America is to remain competitive in the next century. We simply cannot afford to continue under-educating so many, from so early in their education," said Senator Iris Y. Martinez (IL.), NHCSL President.

The paper provides policy recommendations for state and federal stakeholders in improving educational outcomes for those classified as ELL at all levels and for middle school preparation. Most ELL students are not reclassified as English proficient by middle school. Thus the paper calls for specific attention to ELL education through better professional development and support for teachers of ELLs, evidence-based ELL programs, and transparency of outcomes of students before the transition to middle school, where the Latino dropout rate is at critical levels for previous low-achievers.

Findings in the study also point out that low achievement in middle school is comprised by multifaceted factors that hinder a student future success in high school and college. Suggested recommendations include focus on engagement and motivation, as well as college awareness and career development.

"When a child previously classified as ELL starts middle school academically underprepared and English-deficient, he or she is very likely to dropout. We must pay attention early, and short-circuit this pattern of low-achievement to dropout", said Dr. Harry Pachon, TRPI President.

"Quality programs and better teacher support are keys to better education for Latinos. As legislators, we are working toward policies that serve the diversity of students in all states and territories well and to high levels," said Senator Melinda Romero (PR), Chair, NHCSL Education Taskforce.

Authors are Icela Pelayo, TRPI Fellow and USC PhD Candidate; and Dr. Harry Pachon, TRPI President.

To arrange interviews with researchers please contact Jason Llorenz vial email at jason.llorenz@nhcsl.org or via phone at 202.434.8078.

The paper is available at www.nhcsl.org and www.trpi.org.

Downloadable PDF copy at:

<http://www.trpi.org/PDFs/Closing%20Achievement%20Gaps.pdf>

About TRPI

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute is a nonprofit, independent organization founded in 1985 that specializes in non-partisan policy research on key issues affecting Latinos, including technology, education, political participation, access to healthcare, economic development, mass media, and immigration. The Institute is affiliated with the School of Policy, Planning, and Development at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles-with an office at Columbia University in New York. For more information, please visit: www.trpi.org.

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About NHCSL

The NHCSL is the premier national association of Hispanic state legislators working to design and implement policies and procedures that will improve the quality of life for Hispanics throughout the country. The organization represents the interests of more than 300 Hispanic state legislators from all states, commonwealths and territories of the United States. NHCSL was founded in 1989 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3)

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