

Dr. Mohler-Faria Meeting Summary

June 26, 2007

The following is a summary of the June 26, 2007 meeting with Dr. Mohler-Faria. The meeting was attended by 24 Latino educators, researchers, and advocates, as well as Dr. Mohler-Faria, (Education Advisor, Office of the Governor), Michele Norman (Director of Policy for the Office of Education Advisor), and Richard Chacon (Director of Policy and Cabinet Affairs, Office of the Governor).

I. Welcome & Introductions

Dr. Miren Uriarte, Director of the Gastón Institute began the meeting by welcoming Dr. Mohler-Faria, the representatives of the Governor's office, and meeting participants. Dr. Uriarte shared that given the current state of Latino educational achievement in the Commonwealth, and time limitations, the purpose of the meeting, was to the dialogue focused on important education policy issues as they relate to increasing the educational outcomes Latinos in Massachusetts. The context of the meeting was set by sharing a series of key points (see attached) which outlined some of the central concerns that were identified by participants prior to the meeting. These included

- Documentation and official recognition of the problems Massachusetts is experiencing in supporting the academic achievement of Hispanic students in its public schools
- Affirmative interventions to address issues affecting the educational achievement of Hispanic children in Massachusetts Public Schools.
- Understanding the diversity of the experience of Hispanic children (in terms of class, race, nationality, and citizenship/immigrant status, time in the US) and its implications for the data collection and for interventions to address the needs of Hispanic children.
- Representation of Hispanics knowledgeable about the education of Hispanic children in Boards of Education, Education Task Forces, and other arenas where educational policy for the state is being developed and decided upon.

II. Opening Remarks

Dr. Mohler-Faria opened the meeting by thanking everyone, and stressing the importance of this first dialogue. His opening remarks focused on the Governor's education agenda for the Commonwealth. Highlights from the remarks included:

- The importance of closing the achievement gap, especially when looking at race, ethnic, social economic status, and locality (i.e. urban, suburban, rural) educational outcomes.

- The commitment and vision of the Governor to provide a high quality public education to every student in the state, at every level (from Early Education to Higher Education).
- A recognition that in order to implement this vision, systemic changes will need to take place, and that this work will require a long term vision, a long term commitment, diligence, and accountability by all stakeholders.
- A recognition that parental and community involvement are an essential elements of improving public education in Massachusetts and that schools need to actively work with families and communities as partners in order to make this happen. There are many good examples of this work in public and charters schools, and lessons need to be shared.
- A recognition that the children of the Commonwealth need all of us to work together to improve public education and that dialogue, in which different groups come together to work as collective, are necessary.

III. Participant Remarks (Questions & Answers)

Following the opening remarking, participants had an opportunity to share questions, concerns or ideas focused on the key areas identified.

Comments from participants included the following:

Gladys Parker-Rodriguez, Office of Congressman McGovern (Worcester)

Gladys shared concerns about access to high quality, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction to prepare students for college, particularly around A.P courses and algebra. She emphasized the need for systemic level changes and focus on collaboration need in order to ensure that students have equal access to these opportunities.

Ofelia Navarro, Strategies for Children (Boston)

Ofelia thanked Dr. Mohler-Faria and the Administration for their support and vision on Early Education for Massachusetts Children. She highlighted the importance of promoting bilingualism at Early Education programs and recommended the need to ensure that Latino early education providers and the Latino community have access to all programs of the Early Education and Care departments. Ofelia also raised the need to address structural barriers for parental engagement (i.e. release times for students not aligned to working hours, teachers meetings etc).

Eliza Lopez, Latino Education Institute (Worcester)

Eliza raised concerns around teacher training and accountability which are essential in the work to increase educational outcomes of Latino students. It is important for districts and Universities to train educators to work to meet the needs of Latino learners. This will require a shift in work structures. Many teachers are willing to implement these changes; the unions need to be supportive of these changes.

Isolda Mendez, EnLace (Holyoke)

Isolda stressed the notion that all discussions focused on increasing educational outcomes and opportunities for Latinos needs to focus on the PreK-16 pipeline. No sector can do it alone; a comprehensive approach needs to be put in place. She shared concerns about ELLs and testing and recommended that testing mechanisms needs for ELLs need to be changed. ELL students are the most tested group in the Commonwealth and it's not efficient or effective.

Councilor Felix Arroyo (Boston)

Councilor Arroyo shared concerns over testing, the development of charter schools, parental engagement plans, the drop out crisis. He mentioned that testing has become "a way of life" for public schools, however not enough attention or resources have been allocated to students who are not "passing" the test. It is not good enough to just test students without a plan of success and/or support. He recommended that attention be given the role of charter school development in relation public school funding. Public school districts do lose funds when charter schools are enacted in their communities. There needs to be greater accountability for charter schools, and best practices between charter and public schools need to be shared. Systemic barriers do prevent many families from being involved in the schooling of their children, but there are best practices in the field that need to be implemented system wide. The question of drop out needs to be thoroughly analyzed and appropriate action plans need to be put in place to address this crisis.

Dr. Miren Uriarte, Gastón Institute (Boston)

In order to have a more accurate picture of the situation of Latino children, DOE should disaggregate data on Hispanic children by race and income as well as English language proficiency, time in the US and language spoken in the home. Miren stressed that having this kind of quality of information would better enable school districts will to use data to assess and develop academic programs that are in synch with these students needs. This will allow districts and schools to target programs to the population of children which they are serving.

Samuel Hurtado, Massachusetts Advocates for Children (Boston)

It is important for the conversation of education policy to include immigrant families. These dialogues can not just stay in the Board Rooms. Samuel invited Dr. Mohler-Faria to visit immigrant families and communities in order to get a grassroots look at what is happening from their perspectives in schools.

Caprice Taylor, Parent Organizing Project (Boston)

Caprice called attention to the Pilot Schools in Boston as good model for success for Latino students. She also raised the middle school crisis, it at this crucial time that students are being lost and not being prepared to be lifelong learners and college students. The vision that all student can go to college, needs to be embrace by all schools from both a micro and macro level, and it will require change the culture of many schools.

Marcony Almeida, MIRA Coalition

Marcony thanks Dr. Mohler-Faria for his support on the impending in-state tuition bill and ask for this continued support.

Dr. Ramon Borges-Mendez, UMass Boston

The Latino community has the brain trust necessary to be engaged as partners in the work of education public policy. Given the economy of Commonwealth, this is particularly important because Massachusetts students need to be prepared to join the ranks of a highly competitive market that is increasing based on the STEM sciences. If students are prepared for join the workforce, the Commonwealth will suffer the consequences.

IV. Closing and Next Steps

Dr. Mohler-Faria closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and emphasizing that this is the beginning a longer series of dialogue and work. The Gastón Institute agreed to collect resumes from attendants, draft a meeting summary, and arrange for a follow up meeting with Michelle Norman.