

April 2, 2008

Meeting with Education Stakeholders

**Meeting Summary with Education Stakeholders regarding
“The Status of Latino Education in Massachusetts: A Report”
Submitted by Salome Portugal, Melissa Colón, and Lynda Barros**

The following is a summary of the April 2nd, 2008 meeting held with Education Stakeholders at UMass Boston, hosted by the Mauricio Gaston Institute. The summary is divided into the following sections:

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I. Attendance

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>
Lynda Barros, MSW	The Mauricio Gastón Institute
Diana Bell	MIRA Coalition
Edelina Burciaga, Esq.	Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Danielle Carrigo	Boston Public Schools, Office of Language Learning
Melissa Colón	The Mauricio Gastón Institute
Nicole Lavan	The Mauricio Gastón Institute
Ophelia Navarro	Strategies for Children/Early Education for All
Salomé Portugal	The Mauricio Gastón Institute
Patricia de Oliveira	Student Immigrant Movement
Ruth Rodríguez	Boston Day-Evening Academy
Miren Uriarte, Ph.D	The Mauricio Gastón Institute
Beatriz Zapater	Boston Day-Evening Academy

II. Meeting Context

Melissa Colón opened the meeting explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to present and discuss the report “The Status of Latino Education in Massachusetts.” Colón explained that as part of its publication dissemination and community engagement process the Gastón Institute (GI) would like feedback from those professionals and practitioners who are “on the ground” regarding policy recommendations focused on increasing Latino educational outcomes. The feedback at this and other meetings collected will contribute to future policy recommendations and reports that will be released from the Institute. The GI is committed to being responsive to many different constituencies it works and wants to ensure that as many voices as possible from community activists, educators and others in the field of Latino education heard are part of the process of developing policy recommendations that will impact the education of Latinos in Massachusetts. Miren Uriarte continued that this is the first part

of a series of three conversations. One conversation will be held in Central Massachusetts, the other in Western, MA.

The report that is being discussed, Uriarte explained, is also the first of three sets of reports. Others are related to Boston Public Schools and are forthcoming. This particular report is drawn from data acquired from the Department of Education and it is at the level of a “bird’s eye view” of what is happening throughout the state.

On April 24, Eileen de los Reyes and Uriarte will present preliminary findings on two more in-depth reports on Latin student outcomes in BPS. The Reyes report will focus on schools where Latino students do well in BPS. The third report reflects four years of student level data for English Language Learners in Boston (including Chinese, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese and Spanish speakers). This paper will be presented at a conference in California. The Gastón would like to have a symposium of the ELL research in the Fall.

III. Presentation of Report

Nicole Lavan presented highlights of the report through a PowerPoint hand out. “Tenuous Engagement” was a term used in the report to characterize issues such as low graduation rates and high absenteeism. Low MCAS English Language Arts and lower Math scores were also pointed out among other topics.

Uriarte discussed the fact that Massachusetts has the highest standardized test scores in the country and takes pride in this. However, Massachusetts is second only to D.C. in terms of the achievement gap for students of color. There was a question asked if the gap was also true for the National Assessment and Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP serves as a report card of education. Lavan pointed out that the NAEP score is derived from testing samples of students in different states, so it is different from MCAS scores that reflect every student who took the test.

IV. Discussion

Discussion regarding dropout and Student Ages

Patricia de Oliveira asked the consent age to withdraw from school. Lavan replied that the age is 16 years old officially and that many, especially ELL students, tend to be older than their peers in their grade are.

Edelina Burciaga pointed out that there is an incentive to push students who score low on the MCAS out of school in order to raise the overall score for the school. For this, and other reasons, the age of consent to leave school is sometimes overlooked.

Beatriz Zapater said that they started a program for older aged (16-18 years old) middle-school students because of the high dropout rate in and before middle school.

Oliveira out commented that it was psychologically damaging to have students sitting in classes where they were much older than their peers.

Zapater asked if it is possible to disaggregate the data by race and by age. Lavan responded that based on the findings of early aged dropouts in the report, now they know to ask for disaggregated data by race and by age.

Home language

Danielle Carrigo pointed out that the DOE does collect data on home language.

Participants generally agreed that Latino and African American student outcomes are very similar but that they are some factors that important to note. Currently students who are Black, but not necessarily African American, appear with a group labeled alternately as “Black” and/or as African American. It is easy to lose the presence of English Language Learners within this group (Cape Verdean students, Haitian students, and some Black Latinos, are include in this group). The result may depress the performance of only African Americans (we do not know), leaving Latinos (who are not all ELLs) and African Americans appear to have similar low performance and drop out challenges.

A couple people asked about the possibility of getting numbers of foreign-born students.

Accuracy of dropout figures

Ruth Rodríguez commented that she found it refreshing that the report spoke to the importance of beginning focused dropout prevention in the 5th and 6th grade. She questions whether the graduation rate numbers that are usually offered by school districts are accurate or if they underestimate the figures for Latino dropouts. She questioned, for example, whether statistics reflect students who dropped out before 9th grade.

Edelina pointed out that Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education (Federal) is trying to push for the country to adopt a standard reporting system nationally so that states would not report dropout rates based on different standards (i.e. in some states students who do not arrive to high school are not dropouts, some who become incarcerated are not dropouts etc.) Lavan and Uriarte pointed out that Massachusetts is fairly strict with who is considered a dropout or not, but that we still need more detailed numbers for earlier grades.

Organizing

Zapater pointed out that we need to get students and families to see these figures and that we have to get youth and families organized around issues of education. She further asks what the data shows for achievement post Unz. She also asks about the impact of waivers and wonders how Worcester that has waivers is fairing with their education.

Uriarte pointed out that Family Advisory Associations are being organized with parents of current ELL students. There is a need to work equally strongly with community-based organizations.

Carrigo had a recommendation to consider the starting school later in the day, especially for high school students. She pointed out that many schools have important core classes first thing in the morning and that schools should instead consider high interests extracurricular activities be scheduled as the first classes of the day. Some schools slide magnetic cards for attendance and this can be a problem because sometimes students slide in each other’s cards and it can be weeks before the school realizes that a student has been absent. The “Connect Ed.” System could be calling parents in languages other than English. It would be helpful is front office staff could speak the language that large portions of the students speak at home (which may vary by school but is usually Spanish).

ELL revisited

Oliveira pointed out that for immigrant families, the school systems of their home countries function differently. It is a problem that students who do not speak English are forced to take the MCAS.

Uriarte points out that it is difficult to find figures for students' whose home language is not English.

Data Collection

Navarro made recommendations around data collection and posed the question of "How do we want the DOE to present the data?" There seems to be a problem that when even administrators cannot get access to important data. The executive office of education is going to begin the process of making this easier. Navarro pointed out that we should submit these recommendations through the people working on the Governor's subcommittees.

3rd Grade Outcomes

The group discussed the importance of focusing on the third grade. Third grade reading scores are so essential because if students do not learn to read by then they get behind. After third grade, students stop "learning to read" and begin to "read to learn". Not reading well by the third grade can potential hold back students in all of their other learning. Questions regarding teacher training, best practices, family engagement, and professional development opportunities focused on third grade literacy were raised.

Pre-K

Carrigo pointed out that East Boston and Hyde Park, highly Latino areas, are two neighborhoods with the greatest unmet demand for pre-K. There are more pre-K students who are seeking seats in a Pre-K class in these neighborhoods, for each seat available, than for other neighborhoods in Boston.

Uriarte asks if perhaps we should look at access to Pre-K in relation to 3rd grade reading scores.

Colón proposed that one recommendation then would be to match funding to seats in preschool. If there are empty seats in one community, those funds should be shifted to communities where they lack seats such as East Boston and Hyde Park.

U.S. Latinos

Rodriguez pointed out that this work should not only focus on the foreign born Latino because we should keep in mind that Puerto Rican students are not foreign born and that in fact Puerto Rican students that come into the district from New York schools are behind the students who come into the district directly from Puerto Rico.

Collaboration and Latino Representation

Rodriguez also shared a concern that while, as Latinos need to continue to work in coalition, more diligence needs to be given to ensure that Latinos are represented in the rewards that are attributed to coalition work. There continues to be prevailing absence of Latinos in positions of authority in Boston the state government and in BPS central administration. The questions of "How do we build more strategic alliances with other groups so that Latino students feel cared about?" was raised.

Miscellaneous recommendations

Support after-school programs was raised by participants.

Zapater recommended:

- Professional development for educators to build capacity relative to cross-cultural competency

- Support for Student organizing efforts, beginning in the middle school level.
- Programs that teach families to look at the data

Diana Bell comments that it is important to keep in mind the immigrant population. On the issue of documentation status for students, undocumented students often feel discouraged about continuing their studies if they know they cannot access federal or state funding for college. Undocumented students also often live in fear.

V. General Recommendations by Stakeholders

Subject	Recommendation
Strategic Focus	A greater focused on Latino students reading by the 3 rd grade is important
	Preschool programs need to be made more accessible to Latino communities (i.e. East Boston, Hyde Park)
	Drop-out prevention should begin in 5 th and 6 th grade
Absenteeism	Absenteeism could potentially be curbed with the reorganization of the school day (scheduling electives first, later start of the school day)
	Connect Ed Technology should be programmed to use its function of calling Spanish speaking families in Spanish
	It is important to communicate to families the role of absences relative to school achievement and graduation.
Organizing	The data presented in report should be made easily available to community organizations, families, community members and youth
	Reporting of data must be made in a manner that is understandable by all.
	Support for organization initiatives for families and students in needed.
Representation	It is important to have more Latino administrators in the Central offices of BPS.
	It is important to increase the number of Latino educators in the public schools. The numbers are too small and these professionals are stretched too thin (expected to handle all Latino student and family affairs, translation etc).
	It is necessary to have Spanish-speaking front staff (receptionists and secretaries) in schools where Spanish is the significant home language of the student body. This should also be case for other languages groups as needed.
	There is a need to have more Latino present in statewide Commissions and Boards.
Invisibility and Challenges with Date	Data collection is too challenging and it must be made more accessible to administrators.
	Categories in data collection regarding ELL students, Latino categories in terms of residency, race (nation of origin, Black Latinos etc.), and age need to be made more accessible.
	Teachers and administrators should be trained in cultural-competency
Immigrant families and students	Access to school systems (through knowledge and training) for immigrant families.
	ELL students who have low-English proficiency should not be required to take the MCAS
	ELL services that were cut through Question 2 should be reinstated
Other	Teachers and administrators should be trained in cultural-competency
	After school programs play an important role in increasing Latino student achievement and therefore should be better supported.