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UMass Boston's Gastón Institute to Release Report on English Language Learners in Boston's Public Schools

(Boston, April 5, 2009) — On April 8, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Public Policy and Community Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in collaboration with the Center for Collaborative Education, will release “English Learners in Boston Public Schools in the Aftermath of Policy Change: Enrollment and Educational Outcomes, AY2003-AY2006.” The report analyzes the changes in enrollment and educational outcomes for English learners in Boston after 2003, when the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) was replaced with Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) in response to the approval of Referendum Question 2.

The study finds:

- A widening of the achievement gap at all grade levels between English learners and native English speakers;
- A significant increase the annual high school dropout rate of English learners and an increase in the dropout rate of English learners in middle school;
- A decrease in the identification of students of limited English proficiency students as a result of deficiencies in the assessment of students; and
- An increase in the enrollment of English learners Special Education, particularly in substantially separate classrooms.

This study also includes a detailed analysis on the outcomes for the five largest language groups: Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese Dialects, Cape Verdean Creole and Vietnamese. This is the first time a report has been released on the academic outcomes of Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Chinese, and Vietnamese speaking students in Boston.

The study presents recommendations to the district and to the state. At the district level, the study recommends improvements in the institutional climate of BPS as it relates to English learners, improvements in the identification and assessment of native speakers of other languages, expansion in the programs offered to English learners, and the expansion of the professional development of teachers. At the state level, researchers recommend that the state assess the status of education of English learners, and examine the effectiveness of different programs being offered across the state. If the state then finds that outcomes for English learners at the state level are as consistently negative as those documented for Boston students in this study, the state has the responsibility to either radically improve the

implementation of SEI in Massachusetts or change state policy in regards to the education of English learners.

“The findings of this study are sobering and urgent to address, as the nation and the state place growing priority on improving the education of its children,” said Miren Uriarte, principal investigator of this study and senior research associate at the Gastón Institute. “We found that most indicators had declined in the years after the implementation of the new policies and that the losses were pervasive across most groups of English learners examined. Regardless of how one feels about the change in the policies which emerged from Referendum Question 2, the fact is that it is now the law in Massachusetts. The state and the school districts have the responsibility to implement these policies appropriately and to assess their outcomes. And if they find that the policy constrains the ability of districts to respond to the needs of such a diverse group of students, then the state must work to change the policy.”

"We appreciate that the Gastón Institute has taken a thoughtful, comprehensive look at the impact of Referendum Question 2 and how English Language Learners are educated in the Boston Public Schools. The report has identified areas of concern -- as well as promise, and we recognize that we all have work to do. We look forward to working collaboratively with the Gastón Institute and our other partners toward ensuring that every child in Boston has the quality education he or she deserves," said Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

“This project has generated great interest and support from many stakeholders. In partnership with Boston Public Schools, the City of Boston and our community partners, we are ready to continue to do this important work and believe that it is through continued strong and strategic partnerships that we will be able to meet the needs of all students,” concluded Melissa Colón, Associate Director of the Gastón Institute

The full report will be available online on April 7th at www.gaston.umb.edu.

The findings of the study will be presented to the public at a symposium to be held at UMass Boston on **April 8th, 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.** Commenting on the study at symposium will be Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester, BPS Superintendent Carol Johnson, Maria Brisk from Boston College, and Sonia Nieto from UMass Amherst. **Members of the media are invited to participate in this event. To RSVP or schedule an interview with the authors, call 617.287.5773 or email melissa.colon@umb.edu. Embargoed copies of the study are available upon request.**

About the Gastón Institute

The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was established in 1989 at the University of Massachusetts Boston by the Massachusetts State Legislature at the behest of Latino community leaders and scholars in response to a need for improved understanding of the Latino experience in the Commonwealth. The mission of the Gastón Institute is to inform policy makers about issues vital to the state’s growing Latino community and to provide this community with the information

and analysis necessary for effective participation in public policy development. For more information on the Institute, please see www.gaston.umb.edu.

About UMass Boston

With a growing reputation for innovative research addressing complex urban issues, the University of Massachusetts Boston, metropolitan Boston's only public university, offers its diverse student population both an intimate learning environment and the rich experience of a great American city. UMass Boston's seven colleges and graduate schools serve more than 14,000 students while engaging local, national, and international constituents through academic programs, research centers, and public service activities. To learn more about UMass Boston, visit www.umb.edu.