



# Supporting Latino Students

A multifaceted approach to eliminating the achievement gap for Latino students

Dr. Luis Cruz

The opening line to Charles Dickens' classic novel *The Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" could be referenced today to describe the state of Latino students in the public education system of the United States.

According to the non-profit organization Excelencia in Education's 2015 publication of *The Condition of Latinos in Education*, the following statistics hold true today:

- The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that while Latino students have increased both math and reading scores by double digits over the last 10 years, Latino students continue to

score below the national average.

- While Latinos represent the second largest group of the early childhood population, Latino children were less likely to be enrolled in early childhood education than other ethnic groups.
- While the Latino dropout rate from high school has decreased, it still remains higher than any other ethnic group.
- While Latinos represented 17 percent of SAT test-takers for 2013 college-bound seniors, they also had lower mean scores in all areas of the SAT than did white, Asian, or American Indians/Alaska Native college-bound seniors.

While significant strides are being made to close the achievement gap for Latino students, an important question remains: What must schools and/or districts serving large Latino student populations do to eliminate the achievement gap for Latino students?


As the former principal of an elementary, middle and high school serving a mostly low-income Latino student population, it became evident to me that eliminating the achievement gap for Latino students would require a multifaceted approach. Leadership, instruction, parent involvement, and a keen understanding of the role social emotional learning in the form of effective relationships between stu-

dents and adults looks like throughout the organization should be addressed.

### Rethinking Organizational Leadership

Effective leadership in schools serving large Latino student populations, for example, must be revisited to ensure that teams of teachers, support staff, and administration are working collectively to focus on increasing learning for the students they serve.

These teams must develop a shared understanding of best practices and then tactfully begin to mold a school culture whereby a hunger to increase learning for all students is embraced by all, but especially by the adults who work at the school. These teams should spend a significant amount of time analyzing both quantitative and



## Dr. Cruz AT CONVENTION

Wisconsin has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation. Minority student groups, including Latino students, are struggling in Wisconsin. Cruz, a former principal of Baldwin High School in Los Angeles, significantly reduced the achievement gap at Baldwin High School between the general student population and English as a second language (ESL) students by engaging teachers, students, parents, and school leaders.

He has been nationally recognized for his work in building positive school cultures in which all students, including ESL learners, can succeed. His focus on improving school culture and social emotional education of minority students has earned him many state and national awards. Cruz has won the New Teacher of the Year, Teacher of the Year, Administrator of the Year, and other community leadership awards.

Cruz is a recipient of the Hispanic Border Leadership Institute's fellowship for doctoral studies. He earned a doctorate in institutional leadership and policy studies from the University of California Riverside. □

qualitative data aimed at providing a real-time indication of whether or not students are demonstrating learning.

If factual evidence of learning is found, the team needs to share with the school community the good news and celebrate the accomplishment. If evidence of learning is not achieved, the team should initiate an atmosphere of collective inquiry aimed at researching best practices followed by implementation of ideas that may yield the evidence of learning sought.

### Rethinking Effective Instruction

Teachers must accept the fact that instruction is only effective if evidence of student learning serves as the end result. Consequently, teachers will have to abandon teaching in isolation as the norm, and instead embrace working as a team to reflect on their instructional delivery.

Furthermore, teachers will need to embrace the research on how Latino children learn and ensure that an engaged classroom experience their

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## Wisconsin Latino Students THE DATA

According to data from the Department of Public Instruction, Latino students made up more than 10 percent of the K-12 student population in Wisconsin during the 2013-14 school year. Projections from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Applied Population Laboratory estimate this number will increase in the coming school years.

Among student groups in Wisconsin, Latino or Hispanic students have scored below state average on state assessments. On the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), 28 percent of Latino students scored as proficient or advanced in math for the 2013-14 school year. The state average was 48.6 percent. Only 18.4 percent of Latino students scored proficient or advanced in reading. The state average was 36.6 percent.

Hispanic students have also been below the state average in graduation rates. Data from the 2013-14 school year shows that 78.1 percent of Hispanic students graduated, compared to the state average of 88.6 percent.



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# Transforming Leadership

*Pre-Convention Workshop to focus on the power of 'transformational leadership'*

**D**r. Cile Chavez, author of the book *Spirit Movers: Attributes for Transforming Leadership*, will be leading a Pre-Convention Workshop on Tuesday, Jan. 19 as part of the Wisconsin State Education Convention. Her workshop, "The Power and Promise of Modeling Transformation Leadership," will discuss the importance of modeling positive leadership as school leaders and what that looks like both professionally and personally.



responsibilities? One cannot lead in a vacuum. One can process a compelling mission, sterling strategies, and a brilliant action plan, but none of those matters if there are not people with and for whom one leads. People make things happen. People bring life to visions, missions, and purposes. Investment in relationships is an investment in the achievement of goals.

At its nucleus, leadership is about developing a caring environment that elevates the human spirit and enables everyone in the organization to feel the importance of their contributions, both individually and collectively. Some of the leavening agents that make such elevation possible are empathy, trust, honesty, and optimism. But what is the source of these attributes? How can we examine our lives to even understand and subsequently breathe life into the kind of relationships we want? How can we intelligently guide our actions within the context of relationship to the benefit of ourselves and others?" □

Dr. Chavez has served as superintendent and deputy superintendent of Littleton Public Schools and assistant dean of the College of Education, University of Northern Colorado. The following is an excerpt from her book.

"Why are relationships so critical to the success of the organizations? Why must leaders invest heavily in creating and fostering positive relationships? And do relationships have equal value to defined roles and

*Sign-up for this Pre-Convention Workshop when you register for the 2016 Wisconsin State Education Convention. To register, visit [wasb.org/convention](http://wasb.org/convention).*

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students is an integral part of the daily routine throughout the school.

### ■ Parent Involvement and Empowerment

The parent community must be embraced as an asset in the quest to increase student learning, and channels of communication must be established to solidify this ongoing partnership.

Initiating this process will reveal to educators that the belief that Latino parents do not care for the educational well-being of their children is a myth, and that a collective effort to teach our parents why and how they can contribute to the process of accelerating learning both at school and at home is necessary.

An investment to increase parent involvement will, over time, reveal the origin of parent empowerment, a welcomed condition whereby parents begin to take ownership of

their school and hold members of the school community accountable to produce high levels of learning for the students they serve.

### ■ Support Staff

Adults throughout the school, especially members of the support staff (secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, etc.), must be introduced to the vital role they can have in the academic achievement of Latino students.

Social emotional learning in the form of relationships conducive to supporting student learning is an essential component of the formula needed to empower students to take an active role in accelerating their learning. Leaders must begin to utilize human resources in a manner that extends beyond the “management” of the school and instead institutionalizes the innate desire adults throughout the organization

may have to make a positive difference in the lives of students.

Eliminating the achievement gap for Latino students will only be accomplished if schools and districts focus on enhancing each of the strands noted in this narrative.

While there is no doubt that the effective implementation of each of the strands noted (leadership, instruction, parent involvement and social emotional learning) would prove beneficial to students of any background, it will be critical to the overall state of the Latino community that practices such as the ones observed become common in schools serving a majority Latino student population. The future state of the Latino community depends on it. ■

*Dr. Luis Cruz is a former principal who has been nationally recognized for his work in improving student achievement among minority students.*

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