

*Recommendations for
Improving
Latino Student Achievement*

**Submitted to the
Montgomery County Board of Education and
Montgomery County Public Schools**

**Prepared by the Montgomery County
Latino Education Coalition**

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Executive Summary

Latino enrollment in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is currently 20.1%. Latino student performance, however, is far below that of other students. In 2005, Latino students had the lowest graduation rate in the County (82.23) and had also fared worse than Asian, White and African American students in regard to graduation rates the previous year. For two years in a row, Latino students have also had the highest dropout rate (3.74 in 2004 and 3.88 in 2005). For the past ten years, Latino students have had lower attendance rates than Whites, Asians and African American high school students. In 2005, of the 325 Latino student dropouts from MCPS, 171 were listed as dropping out for “lack of interest.”

These figures sound an alarm that needs to be heard by the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools and all MCPS administrators, as well as the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations. The alarm has been heard within the Latino community and among those of us working on behalf of Latino youth and their families in the county. The Montgomery County Latino Education Coalition urges diligent action to avoid MCPS simply becoming a revolving door for Latino youth to enter and exit from while failing to acquire even the basic skills necessary to become productive citizens.

The Coalition came together in summer 2005 to examine the most important factors influencing poor Latino student achievement and to prepare a set of recommendations for addressing those factors. MCPS has not kept up with the tremendous influx of Latino students into the school system in such a way as to appropriately meet the needs of this new community, many from rural, impoverished areas of Latin America. While a number of efforts have been started, many have stalled. The Coalition hopes to regain the momentum and work with MCPS in three specific areas:

Addressing the needs of older students entering the school system at the high school level with limited and/or interrupted formal education.

Addressing the extent and quality of Latino parent involvement and outreach to Latino parents.

Addressing the cultural and linguistic competency of the MCPS school system and staff

MCPS provides programs for students who are entering the school system with limited English proficiency and/or interrupted or inadequate education. These programs are meant to help students gain the skills they need to be successful in the mainstream classrooms. Too many of these young people, especially those entering at the high school level, are falling through the cracks of the school system, dropping out of school and otherwise failing. One area of recommendations addresses the need to explore alternative options for these students.

Involving parents in education has been shown to improve student academic achievement among all racial and ethnic groups. Latino parents experience particular barriers to educational involvement including language and culture. The recommendations address ways that MCPS can improve outreach to Latino parents so that they can become more involved with the schools and their children's education.

Finally, to best serve students, school staff needs to be able to provide culturally competent services to parents and students. This is necessary to allow students and parents to develop relationships with the schools in which concerns can be raised, problems can be addressed and students are able to perform better. This includes hiring professional staff that reflects the community members being served. The Coalition examined cultural and linguistic competence within MCPS and its recommendations include greater efforts by the school system to recruit and retain more culturally and linguistically competent personnel.

The following summarizes the Coalition's recommendations in each of the three areas.

Support for Older Students with Interrupted or Limited Education

1. Create a Task Force under the direction of Dr. Frieda K. Lacey that will include MCPS and community representation and that will be charged with designing a pilot program for addressing the needs of high school students entering MCPS with limited or interrupted education for implementation no later than FY 08'.

Immediately convene a Steering Committee to head up the Task Force.

The Task Force will be responsible for a detailed examination of the current population of youth entering MCPS with limited or interrupted education.

Provide the Task Force with access to data, MCPS personnel and outside consultants necessary to properly complete its work.

Support the work of the Task Force, including, but not limited to, the designation of an administrative support person assigned to the Task Force as well as financial resources for outside consulting services, as needed.

Charge the Task Force with completing its recommendations in time for presentation during the fall 2006 MCPS Strategic Planning process.

2. Improve the screening currently being done of youth from those countries which experience low literacy levels among the general population and improve the collection of data regarding these youth to better assess their success in MCPS.

Administer an additional screening tool, in Spanish, which will assess literacy level in a student's native language.

Eliminate the "2 year rule" for referrals to the existing Multidisciplinary, Education, Training and Support Program (METS) and refer any and all youth to METS with low literacy in their first language.

Remove the current limitation of only assessing METS eligibility for students in 3rd grade or higher.

Improve long-term data collection on students entering the METS program, in particular the data pertaining to attendance, graduation and drop out numbers.

Implement Proactive Outreach for Latino Parent Involvement

1. For each school with high concentrations of Latino students, deploy, or if needed, hire a parent community specialist with language and cultural competence skills to work with Latino parents.

Define measurable school Latino outreach objectives and minimum standards for effective Latino parent engagement.

Hire appropriate school staff translators to meet increasing Spanish translation needs and train them for specific programs, such as special education.

Increase daytime, evening and weekend hours for staff to meet with parents whose work schedules are not flexible.

2. Provide funding to community organizations that are able to work with Latino parents and help them become more involved in their children's education.

Require special training for new families, with particular attention to diverse populations of the school communities.

Require a research-based approach which takes into consideration the diverse populations of individual schools for training school personnel in those sites with high concentrations of Latinos.

Purchase the California training program for Latino parents established by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) so MCPS staff and parents can be trained in this method of increasing parent involvement.

Institutionalize Language and Cultural Competency to Achieve Academic Success for Latino Students

1. Implement, within MCPS, a personnel task group to improve recruitment, retention and promotion practices to increase the number of Latino teachers and administrators.

Train Latino staff as recruiters to establish personal connections with potential hires. Provide bonuses for bilingual (Spanish/English) MCPS staff that pass a standard Spanish test. Identify these teachers as a language resource in the schools that have high concentrations of Latino students.

Identify and recruit into the school system Latinos who are interested in changing careers as well as those who have work permits and the educational background to become teachers.

Hire a Latino Recruiter to work in MCPS' Human Resources Office.

Establish partnerships with local, regional and national Latino organizations to support the effort to recruit Latino staff.

2. Examine other school districts in the country facing similar challenges and their responses to these challenges, in order to ascertain a best practices model.

Have qualified Latino professionals teach on a part-time basis at schools with a high-concentration of Latinos.

Evaluate the current recruiting strategies in MCPS, including the program which partners with local universities. Compare the MCPS program to the Wichita, KA, Grow Your Own Teacher Program, and implement a best practices model.

Recommendations for Improving Latino Student Achievement

Background

A number of efforts by MCPS and the Latino community to address the achievement gap have begun over the years but they have stalled, leaving no new initiatives specifically addressing Latino student achievement. The current Recommendations are an attempt to once again bring attention to these students and the particular factors that impact their achievement.

On May 18, 2005, the Citizens Advisory Board of the Upcounty Regional Service Center, the Upcounty Regional Service Center and the Upcounty Latino Network co-sponsored a community forum to address ways for overcoming challenges to Academic success for Latino youth. The forum was attended by over 100 community members, demonstrating their support for the *Call to Action* of the Upcounty Latino Network's Youth, Families and Education Work Group. The *Call to Action* recommended: 1) strengthening culturally and linguistically competent after-school programs for Latino students; 2) funding culturally and linguistically competent after-school academic support programs that paid special attention to youth with poor academic foundations in their native language; 3) increasing the number of Latino educators and administrators at those schools with high Latino enrollment and; 4) more timely identification of and interventions on behalf of potential METS students.

That community forum was followed by a meeting on May 23, 2005, initiated by Dr. Frieda Lacey, MCPS Deputy Superintendent. In addition to representatives from MCPS and the Board of Education, Dr. Lacey also invited representatives from community groups that included *Los Padres* Latino Committee SSIMS, CASA of Maryland, the ESOL Advisory Committee, *Conquista Tus Sueños*, Impact Silver Spring, Identity, Inc., *Centro Familia*, the Hispanic Alliance, and Education 2000. After a review of statistical data presented by then-Board President Patricia O'Neill and an update on MCPS initiatives addressing the achievement gap, the group was encouraged to continue to meet and return to MCPS with proposed recommendations for overcoming the challenges confronting our Latino students. Thus the Montgomery County Latino Education Coalition was formed.

The Coalition convened on four separate occasions during 2005 and solicited input regarding the most pressing issues impacting Latino student achievement from over 34 individuals representing more than 22 different entities. The Coalition broke into separate work groups to more fully analyze the feedback received from the community and shape the recommendations to be presented to MCPS. The result of this effort is a broad community consensus regarding the three most pressing issues impacting Latino student achievement in Montgomery County:

1. lack of appropriate support for older students entering the system with limited or interrupted education,
2. low levels of parent involvement, and
3. lack of cultural and linguistic competence within MCPS and among its staff.

This document by no means addresses all the issues impacting the achievement gap, but it does reflect extensive community consensus and mirrors the issues highlighted in the *Call to Action*

issued by the Upcounty Latino Network almost one year ago. We cannot allow another year to pass. The areas of concern are clear, reflect in-depth analysis of the problems and are echoed by a broad and growing segment of the community.

Overview of the Problem

MCPS student enrollment has changed rapidly since 1990, mirroring population changes throughout the county. From 1990 to 2004, the total county population grew by 20.5%. During that same time period, the Latino population in the county grew from 7.4% to 13.3%. Since 2003, Latino enrollment in MCPS has grown more rapidly than any other racial or ethnic group. In the current school year, Latino enrollment in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is 20.1%. Latino student enrollment is fast approaching the 30,000 mark and there is an urgency to act to reduce the achievement gap before it becomes more difficult and more costly to address.

Latino students are not performing as well academically as other students in the school system. From 2002-2004 they had higher drop-out rates and lower graduation rates than Whites, Asians, and African-Americans. During the 2003-2004 school year, Latino students scored lower than White and Asian students on all standardized test measures. On about half the tests, they scored lowest of all racial/ethnic groups. Latinos are overrepresented in alternative programs for youth with “behavioral problems” where they currently make up 30% of those students.

Presently, 13 of our schools have Latino enrollment over 50%, and in one elementary school Latinos are over 70% of the student body. Twenty three of our schools have Latino enrollment of between 30% - 40%, and at an additional six schools the Latino population makes up between 40% - 50% of the population.

Three Recommendation Areas

AREA # 1: Support for Older Students with Interrupted or Limited Education

Background and Overview of the Issue

Civil wars raged throughout Central America during the 1980s and resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and disappearances and caused hundreds of thousand to flee their homelands. Those civil wars have now ended, but poverty, persecution and civil unrest continue to bring large numbers of Central Americans to our area. According to the most recent US Census figures “El Salvador is the largest single source of Spanish-speaking immigrants to Maryland” making up about one quarter of all Latin American immigrants to the state. The majority of Central American youth and families who have immigrated to Montgomery County are from rural and neglected areas of their home countries. Landless peasants and urban poor, those who suffer the most even during stable economic times, have continued to come to this area in large numbers because of the ongoing political oppression, natural disasters and poverty.

Students often do not come to the U.S. equipped with the usual academic tools and supports that assist with a smooth transition into a new school system and that can predict academic success. A low level of literacy in these countries is an important factor impacting student success. Although El Salvadoran law mandates compulsory public school education through the 9th grade, it is widely known that enforcement of this law is lax, particularly in rural areas. Only slightly more than half of the school-age children actually attend school. The public school system in El Salvador is also poorly financed. Resources allocated to education in El Salvador are a reflection of the low priority the government has assigned to this sector. In addition to public education being a historically low government priority, the aftermath of a 12 year civil conflict that did not end until 1992, widespread poverty, the lengthy separation of many youth from their parents, and the proliferation of street gangs all contribute to an extremely interrupted educational foundation for many Salvadoran youth.

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Hemisphere. Unemployment ranges from 15 to 75 percent, and landless peasants are dependent upon seasonal agricultural work. Economic survival often requires families to put their children to work, rather than put them in school. Illiteracy in Honduras ranges from over 40% of the total population to more than 80% of the population in rural areas. Less than half of children enrolled in public schools complete the elementary school level. Natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch, worsened the economic situation of the country and led to increased immigration to the United States.

Guatemala did not sign its Peace Accords until 1996 and, after thousands of people lost their lives during that lengthy civil war, it still struggles with some of the highest rates of illiteracy in the Americas. In Guatemala the average number of years of schooling of adults is 3.5 years. This is in stark contrast to 12 years for adults in the United States.

The Board of Education Policy on Quality Integrated Education sets forth MCPS’ commitment to providing the support that students need to achieve their educational potential. This policy

ensures a quality education for all students while creating a diverse learning environment. The policy states,

“The student population of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has become increasingly diverse. Further, the numbers of students who require specialized assistance because they lack English or adequate educational preparation have increased dramatically. The school system must respond to the needs of these children, and must do so in a setting which does not isolate them, stereotype them, or fail to educate them effectively.” (Board of Education, 1993, p.1) (emphasis added)

Unfortunately, MCPS is failing to effectively educate a segment of its school population which is composed of a majority of Latino students. This sub-group, which is not receiving the resources necessary to achieve academically, is composed mostly of those students entering MCPS from Central American countries with interrupted, disrupted or no previous schooling. Although the Multidisciplinary, Education, Training and Support Program (METS Program) of MCPS is designed to meet the linguistic and academic needs of these English Language Learners, there are numerous, serious shortfalls within this system.

International students are assessed for their eligibility for enrollment in MCPS through an intake process conducted in the International Student Admissions Office. An international student is referred to the METS Program when the child’s parents/guardians or their school records indicate the child has had a minimum of two years of interrupted schooling or no previous schooling. This process, however, fails to identify those youth whose school records do not accurately reflect their academic preparation and those youth whose parents are not forthcoming about their children’s actual academic history. Thus, at the very beginning of the process many youth fall through the cracks and do not come to the attention of MCPS until they demonstrate below grade level performance or begin to act out their frustrations with the school system. The International Student Admissions Office cannot serve as Inquisitor. There must be a better system in place to assess these arriving students without allowing so many of them to escape detection.

METS is currently not available to those youth whose age would place them in a grade below 3rd. A student’s age must be appropriate for at least 3rd grade or higher. In order to assess METS placement, MCPS administers Fairfax County Public Schools’ ESL Program Entry Assessment Mathematics Evaluation (EAME) The mathematics problems in the EAME assessment test begin with elementary-level problems such as “3 + 2” and increase in difficulty over the course of 74 questions. It is not unusual for high-school age Central American METS students to score in the very lowest range of this assessment, not even able to correctly solve all of the first or second grade level mathematics problems. It is a state of Maryland policy, however, that a child can only be placed one year below his or her age-appropriate grade level. This results in a student with no previous education in his or her home country, illiterate in his or her first language, being expected to “catch up” academically to students just one year younger who may already be able to read and write in their native language. For youth entering the system at an older age, this “catch up” will more than likely never occur.

METS students, obviously in greatest need of academic support, receive insufficient support within the school system and not enough resources are channeled to support the success of these students. All METS students are also enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. MCPS acknowledges its ESOL enrollment has “increased dramatically each year” and in the 2004 – 2005 academic year there were more than 12,905 students enrolled in pre-k through 12th grade ESOL Programs. METS statistics are included in these ESOL figures. There are currently over 340 METS students, with students entering MCPS all year long.

Approximately 57% (7,270) of the ESOL students are Spanish-speaking. MCPS projects ESOL enrollment to steadily increase to 14,525 by the 2011 – 2012 academic year. Yet, MCPS projects no increase whatsoever in its METS enrollment for this same time period. This is highly unrealistic given the nature of immigration to the area, particularly from Central American countries. This will result in an even poorer allocation of resources to support these youth. Even in its FY 2007 Recommended Operating Budget, the FY 07’ figures for elementary, middle and high school level METS students are the same as in FY 05’ despite the fact that we are already failing to detect a large number of students who should be in METS-type support programs.

METS students are not tracked through MCPS so there are no statistics currently available to gauge whether or not there are a disproportionate number of METS students in MCPS’ high Hispanic drop out rates, low Hispanic graduation rates or low Hispanic school attendance rates. Yet, by simply contacting several high schools with METS programs we learned that one school saw 7 of 18 students drop out in the 2004 – 2005 school year and in another school, they have already lost over 50% of their METS students.

These are unacceptable figures. They are all the more disturbing when we look at them against the drop out numbers for Hispanics for 2005 wherein 171 of the 325 MCPS Hispanic dropouts were reported as having done so for “lack of interest.” Whose “lack of interest?” We do not believe MCPS lacks interest in the achievement of its Latino student population. The young children arriving in this country from abroad and those who have been raised in immigrant households here in the U.S. do not lack interest in achieving all they can through our school system. Our community has a strong interest in assuring that MCPS provides viable educational, career or technical training options for those young people who enter the school system with severe academic disadvantages and who may not follow a college track.

Recommendations

The factors that have driven immigration over the past twenty years, including family reunification, civil strife, political instability, poverty and natural disasters, will continue to fuel immigration in the future. The numbers of potential students with poor academic foundations in their first languages will continue to grow and we must begin now to plan for embracing and supporting the achievements of these youth. Therefore, the Montgomery County Latino Education Coalition makes the following specific recommendations:

1. Create a Task Force under the direction of Dr. Frieda K. Lacey that will include MCPS and community representation and that will be charged with designing a pilot program

for addressing the needs of high school students entering MCPS with limited or interrupted education for implementation no later than FY 08’.

Immediately convene a Steering Committee to head up the Task Force.

The Task Force will be responsible for a detailed examination of the current population of youth entering MCPS with limited or interrupted education.

Provide the Task Force with access to data, MCPS personnel and outside consultants necessary to properly complete its work.

Support the work of the Task Force, including, but not limited to, the designation of an administrative support person assigned to the Task Force as well as financial resources for outside consulting services, as needed.

Charge the Task Force with completing its recommendations in time for presentation during the fall 2006 MCPS Strategic Planning process.

2. Improve the screening currently being done of youth from those countries which experience low literacy levels among the general population and improve the collection of data regarding these youth to better assess their success in MCPS.

Administer an additional screening tool, in Spanish, which will assess literacy level in a student’s native language.

Eliminate the “2 year rule” for referrals to the existing Multidisciplinary, Education, Training and Support Program (METS) and refer any and all youth to METS with low literacy in their first language.

Remove the current limitation of only assessing METS eligibility for students in 3rd grade or higher.

Improve long-term data collection on students entering the METS program, in particular the data pertaining to attendance, graduation and drop out numbers.

Area # 2: Implement Proactive Outreach for Latino Parent Involvement

Background and Overview of the Issue

The school board first adopted Policy ABC, Parental Involvement, in 1990, and it was revised in 2002 to reflect requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The policy is based on the Six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement, as published by the National PTA:

Parenting Skills

School Communication with Parents

Parent Volunteering

Home Learning

Parent Decision-Making at School

Collaboration with Community Agencies (Catsambis & Garland, 1997)

The current policy emphasizes that MCPS and the Board are committed to school-parent relationships and to including the diverse populations at MCPS in parental involvement activities. The policy states its purpose as:

1. "To reaffirm the Montgomery County public school system's strong commitment to the role of parents as valued partners in their children's education and to promote and increase effective, comprehensive parent involvement."
2. "To ensure that parental involvement efforts reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of local school communities." (Board of Education, 2002, p. 1)

Some activities required by the policy are parent training, translation when practical, providing volunteer opportunities, and disseminating information about parental involvement opportunities and expectations. These activities are expected to be carried out by both staff at local schools and staff at central offices of MCPS.

MCPS has worked to implement many of these requirements. The school has hired 17 parent community specialists who are responsible for building relationships between the schools and ESOL parents. The school has also worked to make translation and interpretation available. They provide a language line that parents can use if they need to communicate with a staff person who does not speak their language. The school has also printed many materials in Spanish and other languages. Examples of translated materials are *Navigating the system: A parent's guide to the Montgomery County Public Schools* and *Aim High (Conquista tú sueño)*.

The positive effects for students of increased parental involvement demonstrate the importance of a strong parental involvement policy (Catsambis & Garland, 1997; Fan & Chan, 2001; National PTA, n.d.a; Perna & Titus, 2005). Additional benefits for Latino students include:

- Increased language skills
- Increase school attendance
- Improved behavior (Brilliant, 2001)

Research has shown that Latino parents face particular barriers to parental involvement (Brilliant, 2001; Golan & Peterson, n.d.; Sosa, 1997).

- Working long and/or non-traditional hours
- Child care
- Disjointed programming
- Unfamiliarity with the school system and their role in it
- Feelings of personal inadequacy often due to illiteracy and low parent education
- Communication difficulties often related to language barriers
- Misunderstandings between the school and the parent

Many of these barriers are experienced by MCPS Latino parents and have been shared with other groups, including the Upcounty Latino Network, a group of public/private service providers that serve Latinos; *Juntos Podemos*, a group which convenes in school and consists of public/private

organizations and Latino parents; the Montgomery County Latino Education Coalition; and by Latino students and parents.

ESOL students at an MCPS high school spoke about their first days at MCPS. They said that those days were difficult for a number of reasons, including being unfamiliar with the school. Their parents tried hard to help them, however, they reported that often their parents “didn’t know anything either.” These same students reported that for their parents and other parents it was good for the school to provide Back-to-School Night and ESOL Night but many parents were not able to attend these evening functions because of their jobs.

Latina mothers also shared some of their experiences with parental involvement at MCPS. They had experience with different schools in the system, and this led to different perceptions of the schools. Some barriers they identified were lack of translated materials, undependable translation contacting schools, feeling disrespected by staff, and needing a place for someone to listen to them and their children.

The current Parental Involvement Policy inadequately addresses these barriers for the following reasons:

Delegating implementation authority to individual schools leads to different implementation in different schools.

Lack of objectives and measures for success leads to poorly defined minimum standards.

Lack of comprehensive policy evaluation method leads to unknown policy outcomes.

No requirement for research-based training and parental involvement techniques means training programs may not adequately address the needs of Latino families.

Flexible translation requirements mean that some parents do not receive essential information in their language.

Recommendations

To address the weaknesses of the Parental Involvement Policy and its inadequacy for guiding services to Latino families, the MCPS Board of Education should act to change both the current Parental Involvement Policy and the ways that it is implemented. Following these recommendations will improve academic achievement for Latino students, and will benefit other culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the schools. While changes to the policy will give further guidance to schools for designing programs to help involve more Latino parents in their child’s education, additional benefits can be gained from implementing proactive outreach for Latino parental involvement.

1. For each school with high concentrations of Latino students, deploy, or if needed, hire a parent community specialist with language and cultural competence skills to work with Latino parents.

Define measurable school Latino outreach objectives and minimum standards for effective Latino parent engagement.

Hire appropriate school staff translators to meet increasing Spanish translation needs and train them for specific programs, such as special education.

Increase daytime, evening and weekend hours for staff to meet with parents whose work schedules are not flexible.

2. Provide funding to community organizations that are able to work with Latino parents and help them become more involved in their children's education.

Require special training for new families, with particular attention to diverse populations of the school communities.

Require a research-based approach which takes into consideration the diverse populations of individual schools for training school personnel in those sites with high concentrations of Latinos.

Purchase the California training program for Latino parents established by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) so MCPS staff and parents can be trained in this method of increasing parent involvement.

Area #3: Institutionalize Language and Cultural Competency to Achieve Academic Success for Latino Students

Background and Overview of the Issue

The work group on cultural competency met with Agustin Martinez, Assistant Principal of Northwood H.S., Matthew Tranzano, Associate Superintendent of the Office of Human Resources, and Jane Woodburn, Director of Recruitment and Staffing, to learn about the plans MCPS has in place to increase the number of Latino staff.

After meeting with them, the work group genuinely felt that recruiting more culturally and linguistically competent MCPS personnel is recognized as an important priority for the school system at all levels of the administration, including the leadership. The Board of Education Policy for Human Relations makes the following statements relating to cultural competency:

1. "Each MCPS employee shall be responsible for establishing and maintaining an educational atmosphere in which students and staff can develop attitudes and skills for effective, cooperative living including...respect for cultural and language differences..."
2. MCPS commits to "provide training and education to achieve system wide cultural competence...MCPS will provide opportunities for staff, students, parents, and community members to become more aware of human relations concerns in the school and community and become actively engaged in working together to resolve those concerns." (BOE, 2003, p. 2)

It is not that MCPS lacks the will to succeed on this issue, but it does lack a viable plan for increasing the number of culturally and linguistically competent staff to engage the large Latino contingent within MCPS.

Mr. Martinez is a member of a work group established by Dr. Frieda Lacey, Deputy Superintendent, to identify potential administrators from among Latino teachers working in MCPS. Although increasing the number of Latino administrators was cited as a priority in MCPS, the number of Latino teachers in MCPS is only 424 and thus the pool from which to identify potential administrators is very limited.

The limited number of Latino teachers in MCPS has a significant impact on the ratio of Latino students to Latino staff. There are higher percentages of Latino staff in support services than in professional positions, and in most schools where the population of Latino students exceeded 50% in the 2004-2005 school year, fewer than 10% of professional staff were Latino (Chart 1).

One study of middle schools that have high-achieving Latino students discovered that staff participation in professional development training and maintaining positive relationships with students helped teachers demonstrate respect for their students, create high expectations, maintain discipline, and foster a “caring culture” (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2005, p. 2). 68% of the teachers in these schools were Latino, and the study found that their bilingual abilities improved communication with parents. This study demonstrates that well-trained, culturally competent staff and access to bilingual services are important factors in helping Latino students achieve academic success.

School	Latino Student Population 2005-2006*	Latino Student Population 2004-2005†	Latino Professional Staff 2004-2005†	Latino Support Staff 2004-2005†
Broad Acres ES	65.5%	66.7%	8.8%	19.2%
Gaithersburg ES	52.9%	53.1%	3.2%	26.1%
Harmony Hills ES	52.4%	48.7%	13.0%	19.0%
Highland ES	73.8%	73.6%	14.7%	25.0%
New Hampshire Estates ES	61.9%	58.9%	1.9%	32.3%
Oak View ES	61.4%	60.6%	6.5%	28.6%
Rolling Terrace ES	50.7%	52.5%	22.2%	34.5%
Rosemont ES	51.5%	49.7%	5.6%	16.7%
Summit Hall ES	56.1%	54.4%	1.8%	20.0%
Viers Mill ES	53.6%	54.4%	6.0%	22.2%
Weller Road ES	51.9%	62.1%	5.0%	22.7%
Wheaton Woods ES	63.8%	65.5%	4.8%	36.8%
Wheaton HS	50.7%	46.4%	7.6%	19.6%

Chart 1. Comparison of Latino Student Population and Latino Staff Percentages in High Concentration Schools.

*Source: MCPS 2005a

†Source: MCPS 2005b

It is clear that a major effort to increase the number of Latino teachers must be undertaken; however, recruiting Latino teachers is a challenge for MCPS because of stiff competition from the lucrative private sector in Montgomery County, and the state and federal governments for

qualified Latinos. Several eastern states with large numbers of graduating Latino teachers sometimes discourage MCPS from recruiting there. Additionally, these teachers often prefer to stay near their families and not move to Montgomery County.

Immigration constraints also make it difficult for MCPS to hire qualified Latinos who reside in the area. MCPS has established partnerships with local universities (Johns Hopkins, University of Maryland, Montgomery College, Columbia Union, Trinity) that have bachelors and masters programs in education with Maryland certification for a program which identifies high school students interested in teaching and provides college financing. This program is currently in two high schools. Wichita, KA, has a similar program, Grow Your Own Teachers, that they have operated since 1989 which recruits high school students, provides an education loan, and requires them to teach fulltime for a year in the Wichita schools when they graduate. The program has had 110 college graduates, and 90 are currently teaching in the Wichita Public Schools (Wichita Public Schools, 2006).

Recommendations

To achieve academic success for Latino students, the Coalition recommends that MCPS improve staff language and cultural competency through:

1. Implement, within MCPS, a personnel task group to improve recruitment, retention and promotion practices to increase the number of Latino teachers and administrators.

Train Latino staff as recruiters to establish personal connections with potential hires. Provide bonuses for bilingual (Spanish/English) MCPS staff that pass a standard Spanish test. Identify these teachers as a language resource in the schools that have high concentrations of Latino students.

Identify and recruit into the school system Latinos who are interested in changing careers as well as those who have work permits and the educational background to become teachers.

Hire a Latino Recruiter to work in MCPS' Human Resources Office.

Establish partnerships with local, regional and national Latino organizations to support the effort to recruit Latino staff.

2. Examine other school districts in the country facing similar challenges and their responses to these challenges, in order to ascertain a best practices model.

Have qualified Latino professionals teach on a part-time basis at schools with a high-concentration of Latinos.

Evaluate the current recruiting strategies in MCPS, including the program which partners with local universities. Compare the MCPS program to the Wichita, KA, Grow Your Own Teacher Program, and implement a best practices model.

Conclusion

According to a November 2005 U.S. Census Bureau report, Maryland is now the third richest state in the country and Montgomery County ranks as the 11th richest county in the United States. With an annual school budget of approximately \$2 billion dollars we must allocate appropriate resources to provide culturally and linguistically competent services to the youth and families in our school system most in need of this assistance.

As the Latino population in Montgomery County continues to grow, the student body at MCPS will continue to reflect this change. We need to address the barriers to achievement that are confronting this population.

MCPS has the opportunity to become a regional and national leader in providing appropriate services to reach a fast-growing Latino population. Throughout the state and throughout the entire country, communities are being challenged to design effective programs and implement initiatives to meet the needs of Latino students and their families. As MCPS states in its *Guiding Tenets* (n.d.):

“A high-quality education is the fundamental right of every child. All children will receive the respect, encouragement, and opportunities they need to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful, contributing members of a global society.”

The Montgomery County Latino Education Coalition Recommendations support this doctrine and engaged in its nine month process in order to help move MCPS towards realizing this vision for all its Latino students. We hope to work alongside MCPS in carrying out these Recommendations.

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