

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Life of the Law School (1993-)

Archives & Law School History

6-1-2010

Newsroom: Elorza: Latinos Need Education-Aid Formula

Roger Williams University School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life

Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: Elorza: Latinos Need Education-Aid Formula" (2010). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 46.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/46

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives & Law School History at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Life of the Law School (1993-) by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Newsroom

Elorza: Latinos Need Education-Aid Formula

Professor Jorge O. Elorza argues that a proposed education-aid formula should include targeted state support for children learning the English language.

We believe that the education-aid formula that the Rhode Island Department of Education proposed (in a bill sponsored by House Finance Chairman Steven Costantino) has a major flaw that must be addressed. We speak of the need for targeted state support for children learning the English language.

As is true across America, Rhode Island's Latino children face an achievement gap when measured against their peers, and a large part of that gap results from a lack of native familiarity with the English language.

In April, the federal government released the Nation's Report Card, describing the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress test administered to all children nationally in the fourth and eighth grades. Rhode Island's report card for Latino children was not only an "F"; we received the lowest grade in mathematics achievement for Latino children in the country.

This is an urgent matter. Latinos will make up 25-30 percent of the state's population by 2050 and our economy will suffer greatly if we let the achievement gap persist.

In the past, RIDE has espoused reducing and then eliminating this achievement gap. The Board of Regents has issued regulations requiring each school system to support extra staffing for English language learner (ELL) children, provide training for specialized programs, and include supports for ELL children's families.

These regulations and noble statements alone, however, cannot lead to change without resources. These resources typically are not available at the local level, as immigrant families tend to cluster in the urban core with small property-tax bases. As a response, our sister states direct funds at the state level for ELL programs. According to a survey published in the Winter 2009 issue of the Journal of Education Finance, 37 states fund ELL and/or bilingual programs at the state level.

In the past, Rhode Island has developed three different funding formulas that explicitly target resources in this way, including the current proposal by state Rep. Edith Ajello, which directs 20 percent additional resources per child in need of ELL programming.

One would think that Rhode Island, with its performance at the bottom of the national rankings for Latino kids, would join the national mainstream in funding ELL programs. But the RIDE-proposed funding formula does not.

To explain this anomaly, RIDE notes that its funding formula contains a "student success factor" that provides extra resources based on each district's population of children in poverty. RIDE

suggests that this factor helps support ELL programs because the population of children in poverty overlaps with the population of children needing ELL programs.

In fact, however, there is not a neat overlap between the two populations. For example, Burrillville has a substantial population of children in poverty (25 percent), but almost no Latino students (1 percent) and no children in ELL programs. Newport, with 50 percent of its children in poverty, has only 16 percent Latino children, and only 3 percent of its children are in ELL programs.

In contrast, the overwhelming bulk of the state's Latino children and ELL or bilingual programs are concentrated in four urban-core communities: Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket.

The RIDE formula freezes state education aid for Central Falls, despite its population of 75 percent of children in poverty, 70 percent Latino children and 22 percent of children in ELL or bilingual programs.

Other states understand the unique needs of ELL children. According to the Journal of Education Finance study, 34 of the 50 states allocate state funds for children in poverty. Unlike Rhode Island, however, 82 percent (28 out of 34) of these states allocate a second stream of funds, beyond the allocation for children in poverty, for children learning the English language. (Nine other states fund ELL programs without a separate stream for children in poverty.)

While the RIDE formula's funding gap is critical, it can be closed without expending additional state funds. For example, the RIDE formula includes a peculiar "quadratic mean" adjustment for children in poverty that somehow disburses \$11.2 million in state funds to Rhode Island's five richest communities (Jamestown, Little Compton, Narragansett, New Shoreham and Newport). Each has a property-tax base per student more than double the state average.

This amounts to more than \$7,600 per student in poverty, more than double the amount the RIDE formula allocates to similar children in poorer communities. What is more, this funding supports an aggregate total of fewer than 75 children in ELL programs.

The RIDE formula can and must be changed to redirect scarce state funds from the wealthiest communities with few Latino children and less need for ELL programs, to children in poor communities, where there is a massive need but inadequate state funding.

Unless school districts with large Latino populations are given the resources to provide a quality education, it will be impossible for Rhode Island to develop the workforce required to compete in the new economy. An investment in Latino children does more than just benefit the direct recipients of these services; the entire state wins.

Rhode Island needs a funding formula. With that said, we should not enact a funding formula for its own sake. We have an important choice to make: Do we let Latino children continue to perform at the lowest levels in the country or do we provide them with high-quality educational opportunities?

In our Race to the Top, we must remember that Latinos are too valuable to Rhode Island's future to be left behind.

Jorge O. Elorza is an associate professor at the Roger Williams University School of Law and co-chairman of the Latino Policy Institute at RWU. Also collaborating on this piece were Delia Rodriguez-Masjoan, parent of English language learner and dual-language learner children in the Providence public schools and a community activist, and Samuel D. Zurier, a Providence lawyer and steering committee member of the East Side Public Education Coalition and Rhode Island Is Ready.

Source: http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/CT_schoolreform2_06-02...