



**Testimony on the Illinois State Board of Education's FY2011 Budget
Presented by Martin Torres, Policy Analyst, Latino Policy Forum
October 21, 2009**

Good afternoon, my name is Martin Torres and I am a Policy Analyst at the Latino Policy Forum. The Latino Policy Forum is a non-profit advocacy organization focused on empowering the Latino community through collective action in order to transform public policies that will ensure the well-being of our community and the state as a whole.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking members of the Illinois State Board of Education, particularly State Superintendent Dr. Chris Koch and Board Chair Jesse Ruiz, for working with the Governor's office to target additional funding to the Early Childhood Education Block Grant and Bilingual Education in the FY2010 budget after these programs faced a 32% and a 25% reduction respectfully. These programs are critical to supporting the state's strategic goal of ensuring that all children succeed throughout the educational continuum and graduate prepared for higher education or the work-force.

For Latino children, access to high-quality early childhood education is critical. Nationally, research shows that Latino four-year olds have lower average scores on tools used to measure their language, literacy and mathematics development.¹ As such, access to birth-to-five programs and services is critical to addressing the achievement gap that exists before children enter kindergarten and is an important component of increasing children's school readiness. Given that Latinos account for 1-in-4 children under age five and 20% of students in Illinois' public schools, continuing to invest in early learning opportunities is vital to ensuring that Latino students meet and exceed state standards. Likewise, the long-term positive outcomes associated with participation in early childhood education show that it is an important factor in the development of Illinois' future workforce.

The state must also continue to support the education of limited English proficient students. Although school-districts are largely responsible for the costs associated with bilingual education programs and services, the state's contribution to the education of LEP students is critical to improving their English proficiency and ability to meet state standards. Without maintaining a strong financial commitment to bilingual education from the state, the Latino Policy Forum is concerned that some school districts will lay off bilingual/ESL teachers, aides and tutors; prematurely transition LEP students into mainstream classrooms; and fail to meet the needs of the over 155,000 LEP students in the state.

As the Illinois State Board of Education considers the FY2011 budget, the Latino Policy Forum recommends that it maintain a strong commitment to funding the Early Childhood Block Grant and bilingual education by restoring each to at least their respective FY2009 levels. These programs are essential to meeting the needs of Latino children and imperative for the state to meet the goals outlined by the State Board of Education's Strategic Plan and mission for student success.

In light of the current budget crisis, the Board should continue to press our elected officials for the funding necessary to provide an adequate education to every child. As the FY2011 budget conversation moves forward, the Latino Policy Forum will continue to advocate that the Illinois General Assembly generate the revenue necessary to adequately invest in Latino children and families.

In closing, I would like to thank all of the members of the Illinois State Board of Education in attendance for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Jacobson Chernoff, J., Flanagan, K. D., McPhee, C., and Park, J. (2007). *Preschool: First Findings From the Preschool Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (NCES 2008-025). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.