



**Testimony on the Illinois State Board of Education's FY2010 Budget  
Presented by Sylvia Puente, Executive Director, Latino Policy Forum  
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Good afternoon, my name is Sylvia Puente and I am the Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum and a member of the Illinois Early Learning Council. 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 am deeply saddened that the Illinois General Assembly has put Illinois' children, particularly those that are low-income, at risk of losing access to the educational resources necessary to prepare them for success throughout the educational continuum. The Latino Policy Forum understands that if a "50% budget" is passed for FY2010 that certain line items in the ISBE budget will be reduced or removed altogether. This situation is unacceptable, particularly when three out of four high school students graduate in Illinois every year without the academic preparation to enter college.

**The Latino Policy Forum recommends that both the Early Childhood Block Grant and bilingual education be prioritized and funded at the level recommended by the Board's FY2010 proposal. Fully funding each of these programs will ensure that low-income children and students with limited English proficiency have access to the resources necessary to reduce the achievement gap and meet grade level expectations.**

For the Latino population in Illinois, access to high-quality early childhood education is critical. One in four children under age five in Illinois is Latino and 92% of the state's population growth between 2000 and 2007 is attributable to the Latino population. In fact, 70% of that growth is due to births. As Latino children become a larger segment of the state's birth to five population, any reduction associated with early childhood education and services disproportionately impacts low-income Latino children. Given the state's changing demographics, Illinois long-term economic competitiveness is contingent upon the state's ability to adequately prepare *all* children for the rigors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace.

However, too many Latino students are currently failing to meet grade level expectations. According to the 2008 Illinois State Report Card, nearly 40% of Latino students are not meeting the state's reading standards and nearly 30% are not meeting the state's math standards. Moreover, approximately one in four Latino students fail to graduate from high school in Illinois. While sobering, these data are clear reminders that the state must continue investing its scarce resources where they will yield the greatest return on investment – and that is through the programs and services funded through the Early Childhood Block Grant. Research has firmly shown that every \$1 invested in early childhood education yields over \$7 in societal benefits including reduced dependency on public services and increased productivity. Given the economic and moral imperative, Illinois cannot afford to reduce its commitment to Illinois' infants, toddlers and pre-school children, particularly those that are low-income.

Likewise, the state must continue supporting the education of bilingual youth. Over 50% of LEP children are failing to meet Illinois' reading standards and over 30% are failing to meet Illinois' math standards. Moreover, less than 60% graduate from high school. The state's contribution to the education of LEP students is critical to improving their English proficiency and ability to meet state standards.

State funding for bilingual education, an area that the Board has admitted has not grown in proportion to the ongoing growth of the ELL student population, is necessary to offset the local costs of providing bilingual education services. Without maintaining a financial commitment to bilingual education, the state will force school districts to lay off bilingual/ESL teachers, aides and tutors; prematurely push LEP students into mainstream classrooms without meeting state and federal exit standards; and fail to meet the needs of over 155,000 LEP students in the state. Given that many school districts already struggle to meet the needs of LEP students, a reduction in the state's investment in bilingual education will only exacerbate the issue. As the number of LEP students that fail to meet state standards in reading and math increases, so will the number of schools failing to meet AYP. In other words, investing in the success of bilingual students is an investment in the success of Illinois schools.

As the Illinois State Board of Education makes its final FY2010 budget recommendations, it must maintain a commitment to funding the Early Childhood Block Grant and bilingual education at the levels it initially proposed in its FY2010 proposed budget. These programs are essential to meeting the needs of Latino children and in meeting the goals outlined by the State Board of Education's Strategic Plan and mission for student success.

In closing, we are pleased to see that the General Assembly has met and exceeded the Board's request for General Student Aid in FY2010. However, even that funding level falls over \$1,200 short of the appropriation recommended by the Education Funding Advisory Board. Despite the current budget crisis, the Board should continue to press for the funding necessary to provide an adequate education to every child in the state.

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.

