



STRONG AMERICAN SCHOOLS



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## **NEW POLL: LATINO VOTERS WILL BE MOST IMPACTED BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' POSITIONS ON EDUCATION**

*89% Say Improving Public Education Should Be "Very Important Priority" For Next President*

Miami, FL — As the Democratic presidential candidates prepare to debate tonight, a new poll released today shows that a candidate's position on education will have a greater impact on Latino voters than their positions on any other issue – including immigration and health care – and that Latinos are nearly unanimous that improving public education should be a “very important priority” for the next president. The poll surveyed 1000 registered Latino voters.

“The Latino community is increasingly showing its desire to help shape the future of our country at the ballot box,” said Janet Murguia, President and CEO of the **National Council of La Raza**, the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S. and steering committee member for **Ed in '08**, a nonpartisan campaign to raise awareness of education issues in the 2008 presidential race campaign. “What this poll makes clear is that Latinos believe the key to our future is improving the quality of public school education and will vote for the candidate with the best comprehensive plan to do that.”

“Presidential candidates have been largely silent about our failure to give our children the skills to be ready to succeed in college, career and life,” said Roy Romer, Chairman of **ED in '08**, “If the presidential candidates want to respond to the priorities of Latinos and demonstrate they're ready to be president, they can start tonight by talking about their plans to get our children ready to succeed in college, career and life.”

Other Key Findings in this poll include:

- Latino voters consider the high dropout rate among Latino students to be the greatest educational problem for the Latino community in the U.S.
- Half of those surveyed declared that they considered the quality of public schools to be “mediocre” or “poor.”
- While generally rating teachers positively, more than 80% of the Latino electorate feels that one way to improve public education in America is to hire more teachers with expertise in the subjects they will teach.

The poll was co-sponsored by **ED in '08** and the **National Council of La Raza** and released at the NCLR's annual convention in Miami.

1150 17th St., NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036

[www.strongamericanschools.org](http://www.strongamericanschools.org)

*This poll was conducted by Bendixen & Associates and paid for by Strong American Schools, a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. SAS is a nonpartisan campaign supported by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation promoting sound education policies for all Americans. SAS does not support or oppose any candidate for public office and does not take positions on legislation.*



## ***ED in '08/National Council of La Raza Poll of Hispanic Voters***

July 23, 2007

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The results and findings in this executive summary are based on a public opinion survey of 1,026 registered Hispanic voters in the United States. The interviews in both English and Spanish were conducted July 18-20 of this year by professionally-trained, bilingual interviewers. The sample of the survey was designed to be representative of the national Latino electorate. It includes voters born not only in the United States but also in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Central America and South America. The survey interviewed Latino voters in 24 states. The margin of error of the poll is approximately three percentage points.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

1. **Education is the most important issue for Hispanic voters.** Forty-one percent of all voters and almost half of voters with children in the public schools indicated that the positions of a candidate on educational issues would have the greatest impact on their presidential vote. Education was considered significantly more important than other issues that receive much greater press coverage like the Iraq war and health care.
2. **An overwhelming majority of Latino voters – 89 percent – felt that improving the quality of public education should be a “very important” priority for our next president.**
3. **Hispanic voters consider that the “high dropout rate” among Hispanic students is the greatest educational problem for the Latino community in the United States.** More than 85 percent rate it as a very important problem. The “high dropout rate” concerns more Latino voters than other important problems like the “poor English-language skills of immigrant students” and the “poor quality of some teachers.” The importance of this is better understood when we consider that more than half of all Latino parents with children in school are personally worried that *their* children will drop out of school. Immigrant parents are even more concerned – two-thirds of them worry that their children will soon drop out of school.
4. **A substantial percentage of Hispanic voters give negative ratings to the public education system in the United States.** Almost half of those interviewed declared that they considered the quality of the public schools to be “mediocre” or “poor.” Native-born Latino voters are more likely to give the public education system negative ratings than their foreign-born counterparts. ***Almost a quarter of Hispanics with school children complain that students are not receiving enough support at the school that they attend.***

5. **In contrast to the previous finding, Hispanic voters rate the quality of teachers in the public schools positively.** More than 60 percent of them give public school teachers a rating of “excellent” or “good.” When asked to identify the most important reason that there are some low quality teachers in the public schools, the largest group of Latino voters suggests that it is because “teachers are not paid enough.” ***Nevertheless, more than eighty percent of the Hispanic electorate feels that one way to improve public education in America is to hire more teachers with expertise in the subjects that they will teach.***
6. **Latino parents accept a significant share of the responsibility for the problems that their children encounter in the public schools.** Our poll indicates that the “lack of parental involvement in their children’s education” is considered to be one of the two most important educational problems facing the Hispanic community. It is also revealing that almost half of Hispanics with children in school feel that parents, like themselves, are most responsible for the high dropout rate among Hispanic students.
7. **A majority of Latino voters thinks that Latino students need to be held to higher academic expectations – like attending more difficult classes.** Only one-third of those interviewed feared that holding Latinos to higher academic expectations could result in many Hispanic students failing and dropping out of school. ***The study also reveals that most Latinos are not quite aware of the serious difficulties faced by Hispanic students. Only one-seventh of those interviewed was aware that a recent study reported that the average 17 year old Hispanic student has math and reading skills that are equal to the math and reading skills of an average 13 year old White Anglo student.***

## **OTHER FINDINGS**

1. Latino voters are supportive of students spending more time in school to give those that are falling behind time to catch up and to better prepare themselves for college.
2. Latino parents of children in ESOL programs (limited English skills) give very high marks to the quality of the English language education program their children attend.



STRONG AMERICAN SCHOOLS



## Latino Students Deserve Stronger Schools

Latino families depend on good K-12 schools for the learning that leads to lifelong opportunities. But Latino students are far less likely to attend strong schools that prepare them for college, work, and life.

### ***Too many Latino students face low standards and unqualified teachers.***

- Almost **5 million** of the nation's Latino students attend schools in states that have set proficiency standards so low in fourth grade reading that they fall *below even the most basic level* on a national assessment.<sup>1</sup>
- Academic courses in high-Latino high schools are nearly *twice* as likely to be taught by teachers who lack a degree in the subject they teach compared with classes in high schools with few Latino students.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Poor education leads to low achievement, high dropout rates, and reduced opportunities for Latinos after high school.***

- Less Learning. Just one in ten Latino eighth graders reads at a proficient level, and more than half of Latino 4<sup>th</sup> graders read below the basic level. By the time they near graduation, Latino teenagers have math and reading skills that are no higher than those of White *middle school* students.<sup>3</sup>
- Too Many Dropouts. A study just released by *Education Week* found that *just over half* of Latino 9<sup>th</sup> graders graduate from high school with their peers.<sup>4</sup>
- Not Ready For College. Latino graduates are only about half as likely as White students to leave high school adequately prepared for four-year colleges.<sup>5</sup> In states such as Florida and California, the problem is worse:
  - About 70% of Latinos who enter Florida's community colleges are unprepared for higher education and are forced to take remedial math, reading, or writing courses—more than twice the rate of White students.<sup>6</sup> Across all Florida colleges, 61% of Latino freshmen have to take remedial courses. Each year, Latino families pay nearly \$2 million in tuition for those courses, which teach skills that students should have learned in high school and earn them no credit toward a college degree.<sup>7</sup>
  - In March, the California State University system reported that 62% of Latino freshmen who enrolled in fall 2006 had to take remedial courses in English and 53% had to take remedial math.<sup>8</sup>
- Low College Completion. At the current college enrollment and completion rates, out of every 100 Latino kindergartners, only 10 will obtain a bachelor's degree.<sup>9</sup>

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**The solution is rigorous standards, effective teachers in every classroom, and more time and support for learning. Visit [www.EDin08.com](http://www.EDin08.com) to learn more.**

■ Rigorous American Education Standards:

- A 2006 study by *Education Week* found that states that had raised academic standards over the past decade were more likely to see gains in math and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.<sup>10</sup>
- A national study found that high schools with a more rigorous curriculum have **lower dropout rates** than those that allow students to take lots of low-level courses. For every two low-level math courses a high school offers, students experience a 30% *greater* probability of dropping out.<sup>11</sup>

■ Effective Teachers in Every Classroom:

- Economists estimate that assigning disadvantaged students to good teachers rather than average teachers for 4 to 5 years in a row would entirely close the achievement gap.<sup>12</sup>

■ More Time and Support for Learning:

- Students in KIPP schools get about 60 percent more class time than their peers, and the results are impressive: In Washington, D.C., KIPP fifth graders improved so much in just one year that they rose from the bottom 15 percent to the top 25 percent of students in the nation.<sup>13</sup>
- A national study found that high schools where teachers provide students with high levels of support manage to *cut dropout rates in half*. It found that support is especially important for disadvantaged students who generally drop out at much higher rates.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SAS calculations based on 1) National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. 2) Sable, J., and Garofano, A. (2007). *Public Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment, High School Completions, and Staff from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2005-2006*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Washington. Retrieved June 12, 2007 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007352.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Education Trust. *Latino Achievement in America*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>3</sup> Data from the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

<sup>4</sup> Education Week. (2007, June 12). *Diplomas Count 2007: Ready for What? Preparing Students for College, Careers, and Life after High School*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center.

<sup>5</sup> Greene, J. & Winters, M. (2003, September). *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*. New York: Manhattan Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Windham, P. (20002). *Bridging the Gap: An Analysis of Florida's College Preparatory Program*. Florida State Board of Community Colleges, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>7</sup> Summers, D. (2006, April) *Steps Can Be Taken to Reduce Remediation Rates*. Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>8</sup> California State University System, Analytic Studies (2006) *Proficiency Reports of Students Entering the CSU System*, accessed at [http://www.asd.calstate.edu/proficiency/2006/Prof\\_Sys\\_fall2006.htm](http://www.asd.calstate.edu/proficiency/2006/Prof_Sys_fall2006.htm).

<sup>9</sup> US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. (2005). *March Current Population Surveys, 1971-2003*, in *The Condition of Education*. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2005/section3/indicator23.asp#info>.

<sup>10</sup> Education Week. (2006, January 5). *Quality Counts 2006: A Decade of Standards-Based Education*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, V. & Burkam, D. (2003). Dropping Out of School: The Role of School Organization and Structure. *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 353-393.

<sup>12</sup> Hanushek, E. (2006). *Alternative School Policies and the Benefits of General Cognitive Skills*. *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 25, pp. 447-466.

<sup>13</sup> Schaffler, S. (2006, December 3). *Three Tips from KIPP*. Washington Post.

<sup>14</sup> Croninger, R. & Lee, V. (2001). *Social capital and dropping out of high school: Benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance*. *Teachers College Record*, vol. 103, pp. 548-581.