

The Vital Role of the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs

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PROYECTO ACCESO

Q & A

How does the proposal to eliminate the CHA affect students and the education sector?

RESPONSE:

The Latino Community will lose a significant voice in the halls of Olympia...a representative body that has championed the needs of Latino and underrepresented students to create a more equitable education system in Washington State.

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Ethnic Commissions in Washington State: Vital for Representation & Educational Equity

The Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs is a critical body that has served as a bridge between multiple sectors within the Latino community in the state. CHA has been and continues to be a tireless advocate for education, health, business and immigrant communities in Washington.

With nine volunteer commissioners representing several regions throughout the state, CHA has sought to ensure that the needs of the Latino community in urban, rural and suburban settings are addressed.

The recommendation to eliminate the Commission on Hispanic Affairs from its autonomous structure threatens the important work and overall capacity to influence state, local and regional policy networks.

CHA has played a role in several legislative efforts related to:

- Civil Rights
- Immigrant Rights
- Workforce equity
- Education (all sectors)
- Health
- Juvenile Justice

In addition to informing the Latino community about key policy issues, CHA has held countless community forums to engage, educate and inform the Latino community about both their rights and need to raise civic engagement levels.

The Commission on Hispanic Affairs, through its various regional commissioners has been highly successful in raising community awareness, engagement, and participation. This role is crucial given the

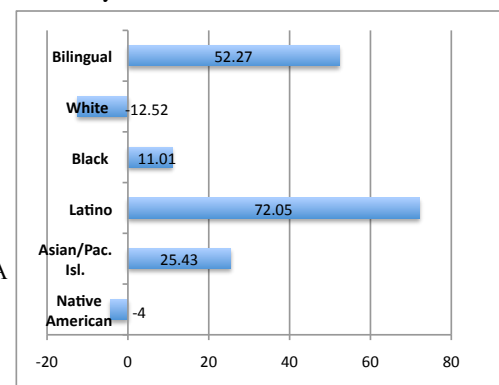
growing presence of Latinos in Washington State.

Latinos are Fastest Growing Population in Washington

In 2010, Latinos represented the second largest ethnic group to whites, over 10 percent of the state's population. In the next twenty years, OFM estimates that Latinos will constitute approximately 13 percent of the state's population (Figure 2) (OFM, 2006).

In addition to a growing adult population, the student population has grown exponentially over the past twenty years. In the past decade alone, the Latino student population in the K-12 system has increased by 72 percent, compared to a declining enrollment of White students (-12.5%).

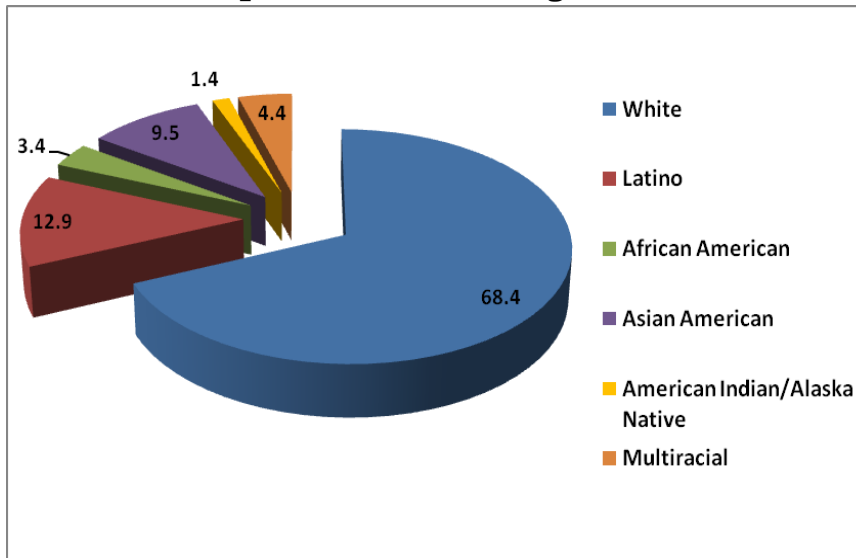
Growth in Latino Students in K-12 System from 2000 to 2010



Source: CISL, 2010.

Student demographic growth has led to challenges in the P-20 education continuum. CHA is a strong voice and advocate in the education sector.

Figure 2
Latino Population in Washington State, 2030



Source: State of Washington Office of Financial Management, "Projections of the State Population By Age, Gender and Race/Ethnicity: 2000-2030." (March 2006)

Making a difference in education policy

CHA has played an active role in organizing and partnering with institutions of higher education, such as the University of Washington, Eastern Washington University, and Washington State University to build bridges across higher education sectors and develop a statewide education agenda. They have been successful at pooling resources and influencing the creation of bodies such as the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (AGOAC).

Specific achievements toward ensuring educational equity include:

- The Achievement Gap Reports (2008)
- Establishing the AGOAC (2009)
- Instrumental in HB 1079 implementation and oversight
- HB 1706 (2009) In-state tuition bill
- HB 3026 (2010)

Such legislative accomplishments extend far beyond the reach of the Latino community. These efforts support educational equity for all underserved students.

CHA Supports and Motivates the Next Generation

The Commission on Hispanic Affairs, beyond fulfilling a crucial role in the policy-making process of our state. CHA serves a very important function within the Latino community as a body made up of role models for Latino youth. The commissioners, as professionals, community leaders, and public servants, are a source of inspiration for the fastest growing demographic of our state – young Latinos and Latinas.

The Commission on Hispanic Affairs provides Latino youth with an understanding of how policy becomes real experiences for them in their communities. The relevance of this role is imperative in a time when Latino youth increasingly need the motivation and support to face the challenges of the educational achievement and opportunity gap. The Commission on Hispanic Affairs makes a difference in the lives of Latino youth by providing them with the empowerment they need to become more civically engaged and productive members of society – a definite benefit for our entire state.

CHA INSPIRES THE FUTURE

"As a young Latino student, the Commission on Hispanic Affairs provides me with a connection to my government. It makes me feel relevant and an important voice in our democracy. Throughout the years, the commission has provided me with an opportunity to advocate for myself and my community. Their work has encouraged me to do more for my state. I know that there are many other young Latinos/as who can be touched by the wonderful work of this commission." --Luis Ortega, Undergraduate Student, Zesbaugh Scholar, University of Washington

"One of the reasons why I chose the University of Washington was due to the University's commitment toward bridging the gap between policy and practice. Not only did the Commission on Hispanic Affairs allow me, through their financial support, to come here and do this work with Dr. Contreras as part of the Proyecto Acceso team, but they also allowed me to see how higher education can be an active participant with CHA to find real solutions to state-wide problems."

--Kathryn Torres, Ph.D. Student & CREST Fellow, College of Education University of Washington

"I would like to share what it meant for me as a Latina graduate student working along the side of leaders of my own community. Personally, each time after our meetings with the commissioners, I remember feeling inspired by their commitment to advocate for issues affecting Latino/as across the state of Washington. My involvement with the Commission deepened my understanding of how research, particularly of underserved communities, can contribute to the development of public policy."

--Karen O'Reilly Diaz, Ph.D. Student, College of Education, University of Washington