

**“The Achievement Gap: No Excuses
Latinos: The K-16 Experience”
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First of all, I would like to thank President Janelle Ashley; Dean Marcela Uribe-Jennings of the Office of Multicultural Affairs; and Laxmi Bissoondial, Academic Coordinator in the Office of Multicultural Affairs, as well as all their colleagues, for inviting me to speak with you today. Thank you all for coming.

I saw on the WSU website that Worcester State is the only Massachusetts state college to be included in The Princeton Review’s list of top colleges in the Northeast for the past seven years. Congratulations! I also see that you have changed your name to Worcester State University. Congratulations again! I am honored to be here to help you celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

The title of my presentation today is: “The Achievement Gap: No Excuses. Latinos: The K-16 Experience.” Seeing the educators in today’s audience, I realize that many of you will know more about this topic than I can possibly share with you. But during my remarks, I am going to try to provide some new information as well as suggestions on how we can increase the achievement levels of Latinos in secondary and postsecondary schools.

The first point I want to make is that the achievement gap in our country is not only about Latinos. African Americans, especially males, are at risk as well. Low-income students and urban students, regardless of ethnicity, are at risk. Many of the solutions we must pursue in presenting Latino children with educational opportunity should not and cannot be targeted solely at them, but must be implemented for all students.

Secondly, while I will speak briefly later in my presentation about access and opportunity in college, I want to focus on the K-12 experience. Simply put, we need to graduate more Latinos and other students of color from high school if we want to see them in college. In fact, as you will note from the research I will share with you, the first day of college really begins in pre-school — if we give Latinos and other students of color the services and support they need as very young children, we greatly increase their chances of graduating from high school and going to college.

I am going to share a number of statistics with you today, but I want to start right off by sharing what I think is the most telling piece of information I could find: National Center for Education Statistics data shows that there is no statistical difference among ethnic groups for mental scale scores at age nine months. Let me say that again more simply — at age nine months, babies in this country demonstrate the same mental capacity, regardless of ethnicity. In fact, even when the educational level of the mother, whether or not the mother has a parenting partner, or income levels are considered, there is no significant difference in mental acuity at 9 months of age. The only factor that seems to make a difference at that age is the weight of the child at birth. Babies who weigh less than they should at birth don’t perform as well mentally at nine months.

This data tells me two things. First, Thomas Jefferson had it right, we are indeed created equally. Secondly, nutrition plays a fundamental role in our development. Nutrition and health care are huge factors influencing educational attainment. Latinos have the lowest level of health care insurance coverage of any ethnic group in the United States, so right off we can see how social policy is as important as educational policy in impacting academic achievement.

What that means is that the solution to the educational achievement gap cannot solely be one of educational reform. All the other factors involved — nutrition, teenage pregnancy, housing, crime, cultural disconnects, inner city economics, and a host of others — must be seen as a systemic condition that must be treated as a whole. In terms of Latinos, we know there are family dynamics, language barriers, and other cultural issues that we also need to address. As educators, we can certainly have a huge impact on many of these issues, but the educational achievement gap must be everyone's business, and will take all of us to solve.

So let us begin. I think the first thing we need to do is to have a clear idea of the scope and extent of the problem. I do not want to drown you with numbers, but national statistics as well as data here in Massachusetts and other states are helpful in defining the problem we face.

On all types of measures — grades, dropout rates, test scores, college going rates, and college completion rates, Latinos continue to lag behind whites, and often African Americans. Those gaps begin to show up as early as age 5 and 6 and are directly tied to socio-economic status.

- 41% of Hispanic adults age 20 and older in the United States do not have a regular high school diploma, compared with 23% of black adults and 14% of white adults.
- Latino dropout rates (17%) are double that of African Americans (9%) and almost three times that of whites (6%).
- Latinos constitute 16% of the total U.S. population, but only 6.3% of all college graduates.
- While the overall poverty rate in this country is 12.1 percent, the percentage of Hispanics living in poverty is 20.8 percent; only African-Americans have a higher poverty rate.
- 89% of Latino young adults say that a college education is important for success in life, yet only 48% say that they plan to get a college degree, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.

When we look at ethnic breakdowns from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the picture is equally bleak. 2009 NAEP scores for math and reading in grades 4 and 8 show that 48 percent of blacks and 43 percent of Latinos fall below the “basic” level of achievement, compared to 17 percent for white students. The gap exists in every state, and is pronounced in urban school districts.

Let me also share some local Massachusetts data with you by comparison. On eight grade math, Hispanics trail whites by 34 points. On eighth grade science, African Americans trail whites by 35 points. Change the grade and the subject matter, but the results are depressingly similar.

A McKinsey & Company report indicates that if we closed the national achievement gap with nations such as Finland and Korea, we could raise our GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by 9-16 percent, or \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion. Closing the ethnic gap in our country would raise our GDP 2-4 percent.

It appears that urban students are especially at risk. Let's drill down a bit on these two factors. The NAEP's Trial Urban District Assessment looked at more than a dozen large school districts across the nation. When compared against each other for both grades four and eight, five districts emerged as showing progress — Boston; Austin, Texas; Charlotte, North Carolina; Louisville; and Miami. Urban districts falling beneath the average were Baltimore; Cleveland; Detroit; Washington, DC; Fresno; Los Angeles; and Milwaukee. The cities where Latinos are showing the most gains include Boston, Austin, Miami, and Charlotte for grade four, and Boston, Austin, Houston and Miami for grade eight. Perhaps the simplest analysis of this data is

that a few cities are achieving and sustaining gains, but some of our older, more blue collar and heavy industry cities are struggling.

I also want to mention the three states with the largest Latino populations — California, Texas, and Florida — where many urban districts in these states are 80 percent Latino or higher.

In Texas, NAEP data shows progress over the past decade for reading and math in both grades four and eight against national averages, although the progress has slowed recently. What appears to be happening is that students in states like Texas have seen improvement, but the national cohort is also improving, in some cases more substantially.

The same situation is happening in Florida, where the gap is narrowing in some measures and achievement is even surpassing national averages on other indicators.

California, our nation's largest state and arguably one with the biggest budget challenges, is seeing its students' scores improve, but in some cases, the nation is outpacing California. In other instances, the gap is narrowing.

Clearly, Latinos continue to struggle academically in our country. I am especially concerned about the longitudinal data. NAEP data shows that the achievement gap between Latinos and whites widens as children get older. Data from 2004 shows that the reading gap at age nine is 21; at age 13, it is 24, and by age 17 it has exploded to 39. For math, the same figures are 18, 23, and 24. We are failing these children. Instead of building on success, going to school seems to have a cumulative negative effect on Latino children over time.

Secondly, urban districts continue to struggle to make progress. The top 10 largest school districts in the country account for eight percent of all students in grades K-12; none have graduation rates as high as 60 percent. In New York City, the graduation rate remains under 50 percent, as it does in many U.S. cities.

Finally, looking locally here in Massachusetts, while the overall test scores in Massachusetts are higher than the national average, the gap between the performance of white and Latinos is larger in Massachusetts than national figures. Writing proficiency seems to be the area of the greatest gap.

So we have gaps based on ethnicity, based on income, based on location. That is not to say that all Latinos are poor, that all African Americans live in our cities, or that both groups are inherently going to achieve academically at lower rates than their white counterparts, other factors being equal. But clearly, the Achievement Gap has disproportionately impacted students of color, inner-city students, and students from low-income families. This is where our focus should be.

Who should be concerned about this gap in educational achievement? Surely the Latino community. The demographics of our nation are swiftly changing. In 2000, 68 percent of our population was white, 13 percent black, 13 percent Hispanic, and four percent Asian. By 2050 (and we are already a full decade closer to that date), whites will constitute only 49 percent, blacks will be fairly constant at 14 percent, Asians will move up to 8 percent, and the Latino population will have almost doubled to 24 percent of the total population. Unless we change the high school and college completion rates among Latinos, we are in danger of having a nation with a permanent divide between those who can make a contribution to our economy and those who cannot.

The changes we must make to turn this situation around are not easily made, nor funded, nor sustained. And it will take a long-term, sustained effort across every state in order to realize the social and economic equality needed to ensure a viable national economy and stable social order in the next 40 years. It is time to make closing the achievement gap a national priority. So

what can we do? Let's look at some strategies for changing what goes on in and outside of the classroom.

1. We must address social and educational issues concurrently. Pedro Noguera, professor of sociology at New York University, has written extensively and eloquently on this subject. I think he said it best when he noted, "Over the past forty years studies have shown that education policy must be devised in concert with health reform, poverty alleviation initiatives and economic development in order to address the roots of failure in the most depressed areas. From crime and unemployment to teen pregnancy and even racism, education — or the lack thereof — is implicated in many of our nation's social and economic problems. (Educational reforms) must be coordinated with other aspects of social policy."

Some of the issues Dr. Noguera refers to have particular impact in the Latino community. I already told you of the impact of low birth weight on intellectual growth. Nutrition education and related programs must be part of the solution. As far as health care goes, Latinos have the lowest health insurance coverage rate in America, at 68 percent. Teenage pregnancy is also an issue that we must address. Unemployment among Latino youth is in the 40-50 percent range. All of these issues must be addressed or all the educational reforms we can think of will not bear fruit.

Latinos also face the challenge of language, but cannot expect this issue to be solved solely by our schools. Here are several ways we can help our schools.

- Language development for Latino adults: National data indicates that Latino children entering the first grade without English language skills are immediately at least one grade level behind their classmates. When upwards of 40 percent of Latino homes in some communities speak no English in the home, any English language skills taught in school are eroded and not reinforced in the home. Adult ESL and literacy programming is a critical component of helping Latino children to break the language barrier. In Willimantic, Connecticut where my University is located, the United Way sponsors parent and family literacy programs. They go hand-in-hand with what is going on in the schools. We say we need Latino parents to become involved in their children's schoolwork. Teach them to read English and speak it in the home, and we might see parents coming to PTA meetings. Even if they create their own Latino-based PTO, as they did in Springfield, MA, that is a start.
- Pre-school and pre-school English literacy education. Almost all the sources we reviewed for this presentation stressed the importance of getting all children off to a good start in preparation for the primary grades. In fact, children of low-income families who enroll in pre-school are 30 percent more likely to graduate from high school and twice as likely to go to college. Nutrition, socialization, and intellectual stimulation are all cited as being important for all young children. For Latino children, pre-school English literacy instruction must be seen as a given, not as value added. At my University, we are fortunate to have received a \$3.9 million Early Reading grant from the U.S. Department of Education to provide English language instruction to pre-schoolers and professional development to pre-school teachers in our town. The estimate is that as many as 65-70 percent of the children in Willimantic are Latino, and of course, that figure is skewed higher in the younger grades. I don't think we can do anything more important to assist Latino families than to give their children the English language skills they need to enter the first grade on a par with their

Caucasian counterparts. This type of program needs to be funded and in place in the many school districts in our country that have large Latino populations.

- Language Immersion must be two-way. The cultural divide that exists in our country must be bridged from both sides. Professor Jason Irizarry of the University of Connecticut found that the use of the Spanish language is suppressed within many schools. Not only this is disrespectful of those children, but it ignores the point that bridging cultures must be a two-way street. Bilingual education must include all students. English-speaking students need to learn Spanish as well as Spanish culture if our communities are to come together. In Willimantic, our bilingual program is inclusive in the lower grades — English speaking children learn Spanish side-by-side with Latinos who are learning to speak English. However, it is not funded sufficiently to include all kids in the school system. We need to fund such programs at higher levels. Hiring bilingual faculty and staff must also be part of this effort.

In addition to addressing the language issue, our communities need to help Latino students pay for college. Almost three-quarters of Latino youth say the reason they cannot go to college is because they have to work to help support their families. The Danbury, Connecticut Latino Scholarship Fund is an example of how we can be successful in providing financial support to Latino students. The organization has raised more than \$500,000 and provided financial support to more than 300 students, student who have attended AND GRADUATED from such schools as Yale, Boston College, Syracuse, MIT, Purdue. Danbury has the highest percentage of Latinos going to college of any city in Connecticut — 80 percent of Latino high school graduates are going on to postsecondary education.

Those are just some of the societal- and community-based steps we need to take to impact educational achievement. As Dr. Noguera has noted, educational reform alone cannot fix our problems nor will it result in improved academic achievement among Latinos and other minority groups without systemic social change. However, there are strategies we can implement inside our schools. And as luck would have it, some of the best work in our high schools is being done right here in Massachusetts.

Data released just this past month shows that third grade reading scores are up in all 10 urban school districts in Massachusetts. Tenth-grade English and math proficiency scores have doubled in the past seven years. When achievement gap size, gap growth trends, and state and national comparisons are considered, Massachusetts is one of four states making the most progress on NAEP indicators, according to the Achievement Gap Initiative, a program started by Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. AGI is funded by the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, Harvard University, and Time Warner, among others.

AGI held a conference a little more than a year ago, during which time they held a series of workshops to review the success of 15 high performing schools around the country. They chose high schools that have demonstrated significant success in turning around low achievement in their classrooms. Eight of the 15 schools are in Massachusetts, not only because Massachusetts is doing well on this issue, but also due to proximity. Other schools were from Ohio, Illinois, Texas, Maryland, and Washington, DC. The eight Massachusetts schools have shown particular improvement in 8th and 10th grade Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores.

In reviewing the types of interventions that have been successful in the 15 schools that were cited, the AGI staff continually made the point that educational change must be “thoughtful and relentless.” To me, that means good planning, solid data, and a 24/7 commitment to change.

In his 2008 book, “So Much Reform, So Little Change,” Charles Payne argued that academic change in high schools is too often left to faculty at the department level, with administrative leadership mired in crisis management. He noted that NAEP scores have shown no real progress on reading and math from 1978 to 2008. High school completion rates have not improved either, and we are falling further behind other nations in math and science proficiency and graduation rates. Payne concludes that high schools are the most difficult level of the educational spectrum to implement change. Let us see how our 15 subject schools are bucking that trend.

AGI staff developed a list of five common factors that they found in all 15 schools they had reviewed. This list sounds like a good place to start in formulating a model for change in your own school district.

1. Local leadership has to accept responsibility for change. That means principals, school boards, parent leaders, faculty leaders. Taft High School in Cincinnati was one of Ohio’s lowest performing schools, and had to find ways to change the culture in a school whose student body was 90 percent African American. Ten years ago, a new principal arrived and launched a relentless campaign for change. In 2008, it had a 90 percent graduation rate and its African American students were outperforming the average white student in Ohio on math, reading, and writing tests.
2. Focus on a few good ideas. Decide what strategies are your strong suits and focus on them. Use your mission statement as a constant reminder. For Paint Brush High School in Maryland, the focus is on enrolling and supporting black and Hispanic kids in Advanced Placement classes. For Brockton High School here in Massachusetts, it is about four interrelated skills — reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning.
3. Good teachers make all the difference. The data on this are stunning. Data from Boston, backed up by research in Tennessee and Texas, has shown that students who are taught by the best teachers do upwards of six times better on tests than students taught by the lowest third of teachers. And it is not just about hiring trained, certified instructors. Professional development programming is a critical component of a change strategy. The schools studied by AGI demonstrate that professional development must be inclusive and driven internally by your community of learners; it cannot be something purchased from the outside in a box. Napierville High School in Illinois has an instructional coordinator who does nothing but assist teachers in accessing and using the district’s data warehouse to monitor, evaluate and improve instructional processes. Here in Massachusetts, Randolph High School uses instructional coaches to support teacher development.
4. Use clear, relevant assessment measures. Schools in the AGI review use both formal and informal measures, and internal and comparative ratings against state and national norms. Some, like Brockton, use visual aids such as literacy charts in every classroom to remind the entire school district about how they are doing in meeting their four goal areas. Napierville High School measures student engagement, reflecting the belief of some that NAEP data does not adequately measure non-cognitive development. Certainly the degree to which students are engaged in and committed to their learning is going to positively affect their academic progress.
5. Implement your plan relentlessly. There’s that word again. Relentless. It makes me think of the Apollo mission. D-Day. Stamping out polio. I am not being dramatic here. Attacking the Achievement Gap means tackling what appears to be an impossible divide and facing it head on. Building what amounts to an army and showing up to work every day, day after day, totally committed to reaching your goal.

The AGI staff found that trust is the foundation for the relentless success found in its 15 subject schools, with leadership vested in teams and groups, not just individuals. Where professional development is both an individual and group activity, building skills and pride at the same time. Where communications are candid and open.

In addition to calling attention to these five key AGI principles, I would like to focus on the eight schools in Massachusetts that the AGI staff examined. Perhaps if any of these eight top-performers are in the audience today, you can share some of your own thoughts during our question and answer period. One of the newer schools in the mix, opening in the past decade, is TechBoston Academy. It focuses heavily on technology in its curriculum; reading and math are integrated into all subjects; and the administration has an unusual amount of control over staffing, governance and curriculum. Two Massachusetts schools that have chosen to focus change on individual departments are Lynn English High School, where its Math Department is working closely with a local college; and Amherst Regional, where the English Department focuses on mixed achievement classes.

Finally, four older high schools are using a variety of strategies to impact achievement. Brighton High School is working with a local educational nonprofit to improve the language arts, while Randolph High School emphasizes teacher professional development to infuse analytical skills development throughout the curriculum. I already have mentioned Brockton's focus on literacy. Finally, right here in Worcester, Worcester Tech is focusing on writing instruction to bring student performance up in all subjects.

Regardless of the strategies you use, I think the five principles advanced by AGI make a lot of sense: leadership must take charge; keep your ideas to a manageable few; invest in teachers; use data to make decisions; and be relentless about your approach.

All 15 AGI schools are doing well against state and national measures. The eight Massachusetts schools deserve special attention. The students in those eight schools outperformed the average 8th and 10th grader in math and reading on the most recent MCAS test. At Brockton, the gap between its African American and Latino students and white students across Massachusetts closed by 65 percent in the two years between 2006 and 2008. This occurred even as the white students at Brockton were outperforming their state counterparts. TechBoston saw a 79 percent reduction in the achievement gap between their black and Hispanic students compared to all Massachusetts white students.

Even as we feel good about such progress, AGI staff made an important point. They remind us that the crusade to lower achievement gaps is misplaced if our primary goal is not to find ways for all students to increase achievement. They say, "As adults, students will compete with the rest of the world, not with their current classmates." As I said earlier, we need to see this as a national crusade, one that admittedly must be fought on local ground, but for which the ultimate goal is to recapture our nation's economic position in the world.

So it is a national campaign, waged in our neighborhoods and communities. In the middle of that national-local dynamic are our state governments, where educational policy is forged. This past January, Governor Deval Patrick and key legislators in Massachusetts showed their leadership when Chapter 12 was signed into law. With \$250 million requested in federal Race to the Top funding, this is one of the most ambitious educational reform plans in the nation; 256 school districts had signed up within weeks of the legislation's passage. In August, it was announced that Massachusetts was one of nine states that will share \$3.4 billion in federal "Race to the Top" grants. Congratulations!

I said earlier that the eight Massachusetts schools in the AGI project are outperforming their counterparts across the state. But Chapter 12 was enacted because the state of Massachusetts, like the rest of our nation, has room to improve. 43 percent of third graders have low reading skills; two-thirds of children from low-income families have low reading skills, and 75 percent of those students will continue to struggle academically throughout high school.

However, every tunnel has light at its end. Governor Patrick was able to announce just this past month that 2010 MCAS scores showed African American and Latino improvement in both math and reading scores. And 187 schools were named Commendation Schools for the improvements in their 2010 MCAS scores. In addition, Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in the percentage of adults 25 and up with at least a bachelor's degree. Massachusetts is at 37.7 percent; Maryland is next at 35.1 percent. The national average is 27.4 percent.

So this state has renewed funding, strong leadership, and a number of homegrown models of success to chose from as you continue to work to close achievement gaps, whether between white students and students of color, rural and urban students, or males and females.

In addition to these Massachusetts' success stories, I thought it also might be valuable to look at some urban success stories in the three states which have the largest percentages of Latino residents — California, Texas, and Florida.

In Los Angeles, the Clifford Street Elementary School (with 93 percent minorities, mostly Latinos) is outperforming its peers across the state, with each ethnic group and subpopulation within the school exceeding state averages in reading, writing, and mathematics. Their formula sounds very similar to the AGI findings at Harvard:

- They have strong leadership, starting with a principal who has been there eight years.
- They have high expectations of teachers and a strong professional development program
- Parents are involved in their children's education, and
- They have a strong after-school program.

In Miami, Florida, the Miami-Dade school district, with more than 90 percent minority students, achieved increases in NAEP scores in reading and math that were double the average gains across Florida schools. This was true at the elementary, middle and high school levels. This is being accomplished in part through the creation of a School Improvement Zone encompassing 39 schools, where professional development is mandated and incentives are being paid to highly qualified teachers. As their report noted, "Research has shown that the single largest factor influencing academic growth is the effectiveness of the individual classroom teacher. Further, the research has shown the effects to be cumulative; students continue to reap academic benefits of having strong teachers even after they have gone on to other classes."

As I said earlier, the solution to the achievement gap also must include literacy and pre-school strategies for Latino children. AVANCE (A-VAN-SAY) is an organization in Texas that focuses on getting young Latino children throughout Texas ready for school. Using a combination of parenting classes in the home; pre-school education; bilingual education, again in the home; and adult literacy classes, AVANCE is hard at work in Austin, in Houston, in El Paso, along the Rio Grande Valley, in San Antonio, and elsewhere, recognizing that we must educate Latino families and work with children at a very young age if we want to make a difference in their lives.

So we can see some common denominators of success across school districts throughout the country, from pre-school to high school.

I said I would also take a few minutes to talk about college access and opportunity. One thing I would say immediately is that, just as the experts are telling us that we pay a disservice to schoolchildren when we lower standards or expectations in the K-12 setting, we do the same thing when we lower standards or expectations in college. In fact, the stakes are higher — I cannot imagine a greater failure on the part of a college or university than to give a student false confidence that they have mastered a set of skills only to be hired in the workplace and find themselves woefully unprepared. We need to maintain our standards of excellence, work hard to recruit students of color, and then support them to be successful. I will mention three strategies that are working at my own college that I encourage others to consider, if you are not already.

1. The best way to ensure a diverse student body is to recruit minority faculty. At Eastern, 26 percent of our faculty members are minorities. This is the largest percentage among the 25 members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, which we belong to. It is one of the things that I am most proud of at my University.
2. The majority of Latino college students are at community colleges. Four-year institutions need to work formally to establish relationships with their local community college to make transfer to senior institutions a seamless process for students. Half the students who graduate each year from my University are transfer students — they are motivated, they work hard, and they often come from the very neighborhoods and families for whom we most need to increase educational access. In Connecticut, we have a formal compact between the 12 community colleges and all four state universities so that entering freshmen can co-enroll and ensure that their full associate degree transfers without incident when they enter a state university as juniors. I note that a similar arrangement exists between the state colleges and universities and community college system in Massachusetts. And here in Worcester, the Worcester Consortium of local universities, community colleges, and local nonprofits and cultural organizations is a model every other community in the country ought to adopt — what a wonderful way to share resources and opportunities for the benefit of students and your local residents. Regardless of the collaboration, we need to be sure that all high school students, parents, and other residents know about such arrangements and we need to be sure we provide the support systems to make these work more efficiently.
3. Colleges need to do more than recruiting Latinos to their campuses; the sign of success is graduation, not just access. To improve college completion rates among Latinos, colleges and universities must invest time and money in retention programs — better advising; early warning systems; tutoring; and similar strategies. At Eastern, we have a centralized advising and tutoring center that is seeing more than 10,000 student visits a year; our retention figures are up as a result. In addition, college campuses need to promote cultures of inclusion — if students do not feel comfortable on our campuses, they will not stay. Finally, we need to include cultural sensitivity in our faculty development programs.

Conclusion

I have shared a great deal of data with you today. I have shared success stories and even some checklists of strategies that seem to be working in schools that are seeing positive achievement results. I have pointed out strategies that work across ethnic and socio-economic lines, and have also indicated some strategies that will be especially effective in the Latino community. While I have focused on K-12 strategies, I have also mentioned some interventions to improve access and achievement at the college level.

I know you all care deeply about this topic, or you would not be here today. But I know this has been a lot to absorb, as discussions about educational policy often are. Let me leave you

with a story, much easier to listen to. It is the story of Latinos in New England, and it is much the same regardless of whether we are talking about Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, or New Hampshire.

Latinos came to this country from many other lands. Even those from Puerto Rico — born as citizens of the United States — faced much of the same conditions as immigrants from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. They worked in factories, they picked mushrooms and apples, they planted tomatoes. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, along the Connecticut River Valley, they worked in Tobacco Valley — 200 tobacco farms covering 2,700 square miles from Hartford to Springfield. They slept in barns and lived in camps patrolled by armed guards.

They worked in Boston, they worked in New Bedford, and here in Worcester. To manage the culture shock and the economic hardships, they brought their entire extended families to live together in this foreign land. The music was unfamiliar, the food tasted . . . well, let us just say it tasted differently. And Latinos coming to this land were confronted by a language barrier with often sinister implications. As one Latino said 25 years ago in Willimantic where my University is, “If you couldn’t speak English, they would put you in special ed.”

Some of us have been fortunate, and have overcome these obstacles. I was born in the western mountains of Puerto Rico. My father moved our family to Newark, New Jersey when I was very young, so that my family could have a better life. Through my parents’ sacrifices and the help of many people along the way, I was able to get a college education. As my father often said, education truly is the path out of the projects.

There are many other success stories in the Latino community, but there are not enough. In another 30 years, the percentage of Latinos in this country will have doubled. For those people, for our own children and grandchildren, we must make the Achievement Gap a national priority. Each of us in this room must become an advocate. Appeal to your legislators, talk to your friends, make this a cause in your churches. It is a crusade we have to win.

God Bless, and thank you again for having me today. I am pleased now to entertain questions.