

Close Oregon's achievement gap by starting early, study urges

Posted by <http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/about.html> **kimelton** September 14, 2009 15:46PM



A new report from the [Chalkboard Project](#) highlights a persistent achievement gap between Latino students and white students in Oregon that starts as early as third grade. It suggests the key to narrowing the gap is to start working with students early.

The report, released Monday, echoes the conclusion of an earlier study of the achievement gap between black and white students in Multnomah County that recommended focusing more on prevention than intervention.

The latest report, conducted by ECONorthwest with funding from the Chalkboard Project, a nonprofit school advocacy group, found that Latino students learn at about the same rate as other students but often start further behind.

It highlighted English as a Second Language programs as a way of accelerating student learning. Latino students who were in ESL programs between third and sixth grade gained about three more points on achievement tests than their white counterparts.

The study said students of color in Oregon schools face a unique set of challenges. Latino students, for example, are more than twice as likely as white students to be economically disadvantaged. Latino and African American students are more likely than their white counterparts to be taught by inexperienced teacher.

The state must do more to reduce the gap, said State Schools Superintendent Susan Castillo. "It is critical that we strengthen Oregon pre-kindergarten, expand full day kindergarten and intensify other early intervention efforts that help trailing young students catch up with their peers," she said in a statement. The report highlighted 42 schools that were closing the gap in reading and/or math. Schools closing the gap in both subjects included Gilbert Park and Lincoln Park in East Portland's David Douglas School District, James Templeton and Metzger in Tigard-Tualatin, and Reedville and Peter Boscow schools in Hillsboro. Over the past decade, demographics in Oregon schools have shifted significantly. Latino students have jumped from about 10 percent to nearly 20 percent of Oregon's public school students.

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