

Study: Latino Students Most Segregated in California

LOS ANGELES - Even though legal school segregation ended in the United States 60 years ago, one study finds segregation still occurs in the U.S. based on income and race. The University of California Los Angeles Civil Rights Project finds that students in California are more segregated by race than ever before, especially Latinos.

Immigrants from Latin America believe that coming to the United States means a better life for their children. But many find themselves living in dangerous places and with a bleak future, said Gary Orfield, co-director of the UCLA Civil Rights Project.

“They are the places where the gangs are concentrated, the crime is concentrated, there is no real job market and the schools are what we call 'dropout factories,’” said Orfield.

In the United States, the public school a student attends depends on where the child lives. Those in more affluent neighborhoods usually attend better public schools.

Economic factors

The UCLA Civil Rights Project finds California is the state in which Latino students are the most segregated in the country. Warren Fletcher of United Teachers Los Angeles said it is not just by race.

“It is not just segregation by ethnic group. It is also economic segregation,” he said.

The UCLA study found that in 1993, California Latinos attended schools where almost 60 percent of the population was poor. By 2012, Latinos were in schools where more than 70 percent of the students came from low-income homes.

Critical care nurse Andrew Lara grew up in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in the 1980s. But he had the opportunity to attend a mostly white school with better academics in a different neighborhood.

“I think because I was better prepared academically, the notion of making that transition to college and doing well was easier for me than it was for my brother and sister who never went to college.”

While Lara thinks busing students to a different school is a good way to create diversity and opportunity, Luis Alvarado does not.

“My younger sisters were forced to bus from a very Latino neighborhood into districts where they felt that they were being segregated on other circumstances. They did not feel that they were part of that community.

Therefore, their education experience was not as rich as I felt I had, my personal education experience being a student in my own district,” said Alvarado.

Certain advantages

Pio Pico elementary school is in a low-income, predominantly Latino community 50 kilometers from Los Angeles. Local school board president Audrey Yamagata-Noji said that while there may not be as many parks or libraries in the community, there are benefits to being part of the majority.

“I would not say we are segregated. I would say we are predominantly Latino. With that come opportunities, as well. I think that when you are the majority, you do not know limitations,” she said.

Robert Anguiano, the school's principal, said, “Our students do not see these as ... any obstacles. The adults do, and we have to keep maintaining our high expectations.”

At Santa Ana public schools, enrichment classes are offered, and students are exposed to the outside world through field trips and athletic competitions. At Pio Pico Elementary, classes are taught in English and Spanish.

Beyond exposing students to other ethnicities, educators say policy makers, parents, teachers and students need to work together to overcome the income and ethnic divide, and help young people succeed.

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