

My name is Dr. Gus Reyes, I am happy to report that 5700+ Texas Baptist churches with the help of Suzii Paynter and the Christian Life Commission determined to take action to thwart the dropout rate of Hispanic students. I stand here before you as the first Hispanic Education Initiative Director employed by Texas Baptists to assist local churches, communities, parents, educators, and Hispanic students progress toward a high school diploma. I specifically bring greetings to you from Pastor Victor Rodriguez, President of the Hispanic Baptist Fellowship of churches. The Hispanic (fellowship) Convention of churches celebrates its 100th anniversary at the end of June this year in San Antonio.

Senator Shapiro, we thank you again for visiting our convention last June in Dallas, Texas. Your presence and comments encouraged the 1200+ Hispanic pastors and their congregations. We also appreciate the recognition you provided to the group of statewide Hispanic leaders attending our very first Hispanic Lobby Day here at the Capital in April 2009. We believe Texans benefited from efforts led by Suzii Paynter and the Christian Life Commission toward impacting the Adult Literacy and Drop-Out recovery last session. Your efforts and progress in this area continue to be valued and appreciated.

Several members of our team reminded me to greet Dan Patrick and to remind him about the pictures we took at the steps in the Capital building. Our team looks forward to future visits with elected leaders here and in regions they represent.

This is my first time to provide testimony to this group and I appreciate the opportunity.

I understand that we are specifically giving attention to the "Interim Charges" related to middle school retention and high school success. I applaud this committee for its desire to hear and help these students.

With your permission, I want to give you a picture of what I've been able to observe after traveling the state, reading research, hearing reports, interviewing educators, Hispanic students, parents, pastors, and college recruiters. My hope is that this picture will help us get a clear view of the challenge we face in our state with reference to Hispanic students.

The Picture:

Just for a moment, I want to invite the committee to see itself representing all Hispanic students in school in Texas. As you know, on a national basis, one out of four children in kindergarten is Hispanic. The statistics also tell us that the greatest majority of Hispanics in kindergarten are American citizens.

Back to the picture: Ok, all of the committee represents Hispanic students in school.

Now, approximately ½ of you will not get a high school diploma. This means that about ½ of the Hispanic students you represent in Texas will NOT get a high school diploma. Their job opportunities will be limited. Their skills will be limited. They will probably make minimum wage and qualify for special health and welfare help just for survival. They will make about \$13,000-\$18,000 a year. They can make more if they work two jobs. They will provide minimal help to our tax base. In fact, they may actually be more of a tax to the system than a benefit with respect to tax income for our state. They will work "hard"

because “working hard” is a value in Hispanic homes. Hispanic parents teach their kids that “working hard” is the key to success. Remember, they represent “about” ½ of all Hispanic students in Texas.

By the way, a good number of drop-outs are prone to find become incarcerated. Texans will pay \$35,000+ per year for those incarcerated as opposed to receiving contributions from them.

Now, ½ of you represent Hispanic students receiving a high school diploma. These students will be able to join the Army, Marines, Air Force, and Navy. They will make approximately \$20,000-\$26,000 per year. They can contribute to the tax base and can survive. They will have more job opportunities, but, will be competing for jobs against applicants having a college degree. Approximately ½ of them will go on to college. They may make about \$1 million dollars more in their life time than high school drop-outs.

So, approximately ½ of those graduating Hispanic students may go on to start college. The state of Texas is actually doing a better job getting Hispanic students to “start” college. However, only about ½ of those starting actually complete a degree. So, many start and few finish. Nevertheless, those getting a degree with teacher certification can start their first teaching job in Dallas, Texas making near \$45,000 per year. This is a huge difference to previous groups. This smaller group can make significant contributions to our communities. They retain the cultural notion of “hard work,” but, apply the concept to the idea that the road to the American dream is travelled by “educated” persons with college degrees. They apply “hard work” toward academic achievement and find the American dream.

What does this picture tell us?

1. We face a financial crisis if we leave things “as is.” We must keep kids in school.
2. We (faith based groups, parents, students, educators, and community leaders) must find new ways to work together to reduce the drop-out rate. I want to make sure that you know that we Texas Baptists have “signed-on” to help with this challenge!
3. We must help Hispanic (Spanish and English) speaking parents understand “education” is the key to success and acquisition of the American dream.
4. We must help Hispanic students understand that High school graduates will make \$1 million dollars more than drop-outs AND that College grads will make an additional \$1 million dollars more in their life time than those earning a high school diploma.
5. We can value the notion that students must excel in their English language skills as well as maintain their Spanish heritage and language. In light of present and future demographics, students with English and Spanish language skills will have lifetime job opportunities.
6. It is possible to predict (with an accuracy of 85% or better) 9th graders who WILL drop-out. If they miss five days in the first 100 days AND fail one class in that same time period, they will drop-out. We can do something about these stats.

How are Texas Baptists “helping” with middle school retention and high school success? We produced *ABRIENDO PUERTAS-Opening Doors for Hispanic Youth*. Strategic issues relevant to the Hispanic drop-out crisis are introduced. Churches, parents, students, Pastors, and community strategies are targeted. A few specific examples include:

1. Enlisting a bilingual education “advocate” for each church. This person may:
 - a. Identify identifying resources, and tips to help parents and students experience success with the educational system.
 - b. Arrange for tours of University and community college tours.
 - c. Help congregations affirm educators and educational administrators.
 - d. Encourage students to finish school and apply for scholarships.
 - e. Help pastors recognize students for 100% attendance each semester.
2. www.BGCT.Org identifies 500+ Scholarships for undergraduate AND graduate students. “Knowhowtogo” is available in English and Spanish.
3. “How to” seminars for college application, scholarship application, writing essays, relating to mentors, developing goals, and overcoming challenges are being developed for groups of congregations and at major events across the state.
4. Encouraged computer-based GED preparation sites in churches across the state.

What else is needed? Best practices for success with high school suggests that Hispanics need help:

- A. Developing their own written personal “dream” of education and educational goals,
- B. With a mentor who helps them navigate to graduation and beyond, and
- C. With attention for the “peer group” level. Hispanics tend to be a “group” oriented culture. Strategies to help the “group” move forward give us the best return on investment.

Future budgets will be tight. We can take actions that require minimal and maybe no funds. **We can:**

- A. Encourage faith groups, community leaders, community in school organizations, parents, and educators to find creative ways to share successes English and Spanish.
- B. We can recognize business leaders for encouraging employees to serve as “mentors” or tutors.
- C. Encourage Independent School Districts to move PTO and other meetings to places Hispanics consider “safe” such as churches and places where social services are provided.

How can funds be directed?

- Abel Lopez and AVID with middle schoolers in Carrollton, Texas (written goals)
- Gabe Lozano’s speaks to middle and high school students. Underwritten by school districts.

Along with these kinds of investments consider:

- Providing English and Spanish Workshops aimed at helping parents understand the distinctness of the American Education system.
- Investing funds that help Educational administrators and teachers understand cultural tenets of Hispanic students. Schools need help to design teacher-parent meetings and conflict resolution strategies more appropriate for Hispanic students and their parents.

In conclusion, Committee on Education, Texas Baptists want to help retain middle schoolers and stem the drop-out rate. I am here to let you know that we want to work with you to make a better Texas for the generations that follow us. God bless you and thank you for listening.