

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD)
Video Recordings

Arthur E. Nelson University Archives

2016

Panel Discussion: "Catholic School Advantage: Latino and African American Student Achievement"

CSUSB - Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/lead>

Recommended Citation

CSUSB - Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD), "Panel Discussion: "Catholic School Advantage: Latino and African American Student Achievement"" (2016). *Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD) Video Recordings*. 5.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/lead/5>

This Video is brought to you for free and open access by the Arthur E. Nelson University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD) Video Recordings by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

LEAD Original Programming

"Catholic School Advantage: Latino and African American Student Achievement" (2016)

START – 00:00:00

[Music]

>> Bienvenidos and welcome to the next installment of LEAD Media Programming from Studio 54 campus of California State University, San Bernardino, the digital media platform for inspired educators, leaders, and community activists and advocates taking our message directly to the people to the gente. Thank you for sharing our common interest in the analysis, discussion, critique, dissemination and commitment to the educational issues that impact Latinos. I'm your host, Dr. Enrique Murillo Jr., and this episode is a syndicated replay from Season 7 of LEAD Summit 2016. The theme that year was Black, Brown, Indigenous Unity, acknowledging the shared educational disparities. This panel entitled Catholic School Advantage: Latino and African-American Student Achievement addresses how for many working class families, the Catholic schools are the only alternative to public schools that they can afford. At the time, additionally, the enrollment of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools had been rising nationwide. From the previous research several decades. Continue and enjoy the full wide value and complexity of this episode. We extend our appreciation to all our LEAD sponsors and partners, planners, volunteers, speakers and panelists. Of course, the production team, affiliates and townhall chapters. We commend them all for lifting their voice and uplifting the plight of Latinos in education. Thank you. Gracias [foreign language].

>> Thank you very much. First of all, I'd like to say it was an honor to be asked to moderate this panel. I had the privilege of sitting with these individuals and they are a passionate and dedicated group of people. And so, I got the best group, just saying. So, our panel is about Catholic School Advantage Latino and African-American Student Achievement. And Catholic schooling began in the 1800s in the spirit of protest, when church leaders objected to the discrimination of Catholic children. Disregarded by state legislatures, the church leadership turned to its congregations, requesting that every parish build and support a school that all Catholic families enroll their children in their parochial school. The result was the largest private school system and alternative to public school in the United States of America. In many communities, parochial schools are entirely supported by a largely working class minority population. Parents scrimp and save to send their children to parochial school because it matters to them and they wanted to make a difference in the formation of their children. The mission of Catholic schools is to provide the skills to successfully complete high school and prepare students for college. In full circle and in similar spirit that began Catholic schooling, leaders are now called upon to ignite church concerns related to the material and

cultural discrimination of Latinos and African-American communities today. The church must take a proactive leadership role in creating the conditions by which underserved communities can reflect and act upon the importance of education. And now, I'd like to introduce our panel. We have Ms. Delila Vasquez. She's the President of San Bernardino Catholic Elementary Schools. And then, Ms. Carla Ford-Brunner and she's a Senior Account Executive, Inland newspapers and board chair for San Bernardino Catholic Elementary Schools. And then, we have Ms. Maria Echeverria, Vice Chancellor the San Bernardino Diocese, former Catholic school parent. And then, Ms. Madeleine Thomas, Principal of Resurrection Academy in Fontana, my neighbor. And Mr. Robert Villaseñor, the former member Catholic Association of Latino Leaders and Vice President, Deposit Relationship Manager of ProAmerica Bank.

>> Thank you.

>> And at this time, I would like to ask Delila Vasquez if she would give us just a little intro, as this is their first year at the LEAD conference.

>> Thank you very much. It really is an honor to be present here today. One of the haunting thoughts that I have had in my mind is how in the United States we make decisions about education, curriculum, opportunity, access. And always counting and looking at public education, never taking a second look, never taking a second to think about the other large education establishment that we have in the United States. And that is Catholic schools. For the United States, what we do and for the children and the families that come to our schools, we create opportunity. We create the promise of college education if that is the choice. Statistics drawn from studies that Notre Dame University conducted a couple of years ago tell us that anywhere in the United States, any student that goes through the Catholic school system stands a 54 chance increase of graduating from high school and graduating college ready. If that doesn't merit attention, then I don't know what does. When No Child Left Behind was written and established and paid attention to, there was no communication, no conversation with the Catholic schools. I am not here to say that we are the solution for everyone. But I am here to advocate for the viable option that our families and our children have. And I was very pleased to hear Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa mentioned that he went through the Catholic school system. In any walk of life, you're going to find many successful people as I have this last two years on the job, who have started their education in the Catholic school system.

>> Thank you very much. We're going to go through a few different perspectives. The panel is very diverse. And so, we're going to start with Madeleine Thomas. From a principal perspective, how are Catholic schools successful?

>> For me, Catholic education is very important and successful since I am a product of Catholic school. Although I was not born and raised and educated in the United States, I was educated and raised in the Philippines, the values, faith formation and the rigorous academics that I received molded me to who I am today. I have been blessed with the gift of Catholic education and that is the reason why I'm working in a Catholic school

today. As mentioned, I'm currently the principal of a small Catholic school in the city of Fontana. I will share with you information about Resurrection so that you may have a better idea of what a Catholic school is. Resurrection is a preschool through eighth grade, located within the campus of a Catholic church named St. John the 23rd. Resurrection is surrounded by an older housing area in the northern part of the city of Fontana. It is currently, my enrollment is currently 215. Students and staff are very diverse, 50% of our student body are Hispanic and the rest of the school population have origins from Nigeria, Ghana, Philippines, Vietnam, India, and China. Resurrection Academy has been in existence for 55 years. It is viewed as a small, safe, religious and academic school that has received a six-year accreditation from the Western Catholic Educational Association and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Each year, our students compete in a Diocesan Junior High Academic Decathlon and our students have won second place in logic and super quizzes for the past two years. Thank you. Furthermore, students excel in high school in our place in honor and advanced placement classes. High school teachers comment on the study habits and kindness of students that come from Resurrection Academy. Students that are new to the school have adjusted well through the attention given by the teachers and the small class size. For example, each year, students have been accepted to our school with no English language background, but have learned the language through conversations, listening, and class work. In addition, students gained their confidence in themselves by their increase in reading and math skills, as seen in their eagerness to take part in presentations, oral reading, choir, recitation of the rosary and their prayers, and joining the Junior High Academic Decathlon to mention a few. Resurrection has been blessed with access to technology in all classrooms and computer lab. Many of the academic subjects have a whiteboard interactive component to enhance classroom instruction and use to differentiate students' learning. Students have access to iPads and Microsoft Surface devices to work on a variety of academic programs at their level and at their own pace. There are 29 Catholic schools in the Inland Empire, both San Bernardino and Riverside counties. These schools ranges from preschool through eighth grade, kindergarten through eighth grade, standalone preschools to Catholic high schools and to private Catholic high schools. In my school in particular, we welcome everybody. We do not turn any families because of financial hardships. Our school work hard to provide tuition assistance, tuition family discounts, and scholarships each year. We have a longstanding relationship with our families in our community to keep their children from preschool through eighth grade on our campus. Other accommodations provided to our families are on case-to-case basis and when the need arises. We continue the legacy of the religious nuns and priests who established the early Catholic schools in educating immigrants and underprivileged children. We are committed to educating our children to be lifelong learners, creative critical thinkers, responsible Catholic Christian citizens, effective communicators, and in creating tomorrow's leaders today.

>> Thank you very much. And on that note, I want to get a board perspective from Carla. Why does the financial investment make sense as Madeleine had spoke on the scholarships that the Catholic schools provide to families?

>> Well, hello, everybody. I have been tasked as chairperson of the board to lead an amazing group of industry leaders to ensure that every student, every parent who would like to send their kid to a Catholic -- for Catholic education, that we are tasked with raising the funds to make sure that the funds are available.

>> Wow, OK. Would you like to add?

>> It's very brief. And to add to that, talking about diversity, I chair the board. I did not go to Catholic school and I'm not Catholic as well. But the importance I think that we did, the gratitude I have been able to sit on this board is that for every African-American child, every Latin child, any child that would like an education should be granted equal access. And that's why I'm here.

>> That's great.

>> Yes, I do want to add something. One of the things that I like to share when I'm around in the community and I am promoting Catholic education for the children who could best benefit from it is that the reason why my position exists which is a rare position being the President of Catholic Elementary Schools and being a Latina, and being an immigrant, I am here because that is the vision of our bishop. He sees and recognizes the need to make Catholic education accessible to those who need them most. He created the position and gave me the wings. And in doing that, when I came on board, the first thing I did was consulted with the parishioners in the churches in San Bernardino, particularly, those two churches where there is still a school. I very soon came to find out that many of the parishioners didn't even know the school was a walk away from the church where they were worshiping on Sundays, that they didn't know that this opportunity was also available to them. So, in consultation with the community, I created the opportunity for us to have a board that would be as diverse as our community. We are Catholics, that implies being universal. We're called out by our Pope to open up the doors and make an invitation and that's what we do. We are inviting families to take advantage of this opportunity, particularly in San Bernardino. I was recently asked, "How important is it to keep Catholic schools viable in San Bernardino?" Not too long ago, about five years ago, we closed one of the six that used to exist in San Bernardino. Out of the seven churches that we have in the city of San Bernardino, there's five parishes and there's only two Catholic schools standing that are not fully enrolled. We have -- three out of every four students in San Bernardino are low income. We are not necessarily graduating our kids at the rate that we would like to and I am not going to blame anyone for that. I think it is a community responsibility. And as a community responsibility, Catholic schools make the presence to help and bring solutions to that problem. We want to educate our children. Madeleine talked about how we take children who don't speak English, and they -- and we graduate them reading and writing at grade level. I like to think being an immigrant, I'm going to take rights that no one has given me other than by my status. I came to the United States for 11th grade. I know about being a student who doesn't speak English and sitting in the classroom, trying to make sense of what is being said. But I'm standing here in front of you and I like to think that you're understanding what I'm saying, that my English

abilities have progressed. I like to believe that all students in any school in the United States are English learners. Second and third tier language vocabulary words, those are academic terms, are learned in school. All of our children need that expectation and need that ability. In Catholic schools, we take the children in with the expectation that they can learn. And that's the difference that we bring, the opportunity that we provide. And that's why it's important that we have financial assistance for our families. In San Bernardino, the average income is \$37,000 a year for a family of four. Cost in Catholic school is \$4,000 a year. That's not a lot for many people. But when you make \$37,000 a year, that is a lot of money to put in there. But it is an investment, an investment that is worthwhile investing in.

>> Thank you very much. Now speaking of an investment, if Maria could answer the question what are the influencing factors to their success and why is Catholic school a viable option for parents?

>> To be honest with you, as a young woman, I didn't know that Catholic school was an option for my children. I thought only rich kids went to Catholic school. That's the way it was in Mexico where my family came from. So, I didn't think that that was going to happen. But then, I met my husband back in college and his father was a shoemaker in East LA. And somehow, he was able to send all seven of his children to Catholic school from kindergarten through high school. He had two jobs to support the family and he made an investment. So, if he could do it, I knew my husband and I would somehow find a way. Why was it important for us to send them to Catholic school? Public schools have a very good education but for us, we wanted them to yes, get a solid education. Yes, be successful. Everybody wants their kids to be successful. But we also wanted them to grow up in an atmosphere that fosters the values that are important to our family. The family values, things like respect, respect for themselves, respect for other people, things like integrity, things like gratitude, to be grateful for what we have and not grow up feeling entitled to something, to have to work hard for what you get. Things like ethics, our children had ethics classes every year. Things like self-worth and dignity, those were very important family values that we wanted our children to have. And so, we decided that every sacrifice was worth it. Our children were worth it. And so, instead of taking trips to go on vacation, we went camping. We camped at the beach. We camped at the mountains. And yes, they were happy campers. And they rode their bikes. The children were happy. It was good family time. Instead of eating out all the time, we cook their own food. Instead of going to the movies, we rented one. So, it was not, in reality it was not as hard as we thought it was going to be. We never lacked for anything. We had jobs. We did what we could and the children were happy. I am glad to report that our children grew up to be, knock on wood, good people. They did graduate from high school where they took AP classes. They all went to college and they are good members of this society. They grew up with these values that we wanted for them. Up to now, one very simple thing that they learned and they conserve and they share with the community is the very simple principle that it is nice to be important but it's more important to be nice.

>> Yeah, that's good.

>> So, those are my kids. Thank you.

>> Thank you very much. And from a legacy perspective, if Robert, you could let us know why Catholic education is important for future generations?

>> Well, I like Mayor Villaraigosa don't have the privilege of having everybody follow me out the door. Now, I really know what those big stars feel like when they have to follow a bigger name. I get to follow the legacy of my mother, who -- I was going to say, Governor Villaraigosa, stated he followed his mom. My mom in the 70s divorced a very Catholic father of mine. I have an aunt who is a Carmelite sister, a semi-cloister and an uncle who's a priest. Both of them were his siblings. My father was going to be a priest. So, when my mom and dad met, which was in Calexico, right over here, a few years went by they started having children. My mother was a graduate from Our Lady of Guadalupe in Calexico. And she said to us, "You will go to Catholic school." We hated it. I'm not going to lie. I hated wearing those corduroy pants in October with a shirt that didn't fit. It was always el chueco and I didn't like it. But now as an adult, I married a woman and she's been my wife for 34 years because of those principles. Because of those principles, we had children. She went to Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, which if any of you know the Sacred Hearts in Los Angeles, there's four major Sacred Hearts. Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sacred Heart of Mary, now Cantwell-Sacred Heart of Mary, and then another Sacred Heart, and then there's Flintridge Sacred Heart. My wife went to Flintridge Sacred Heart, where the tuition at Flintridge Sacred Heart back in 19 [inaudible] was \$10,000 a school year. I looked at her and I said, "Are your parents rich? Because then, I'll marry you tomorrow." She said, "No. My parents aren't rich. But they wanted me to receive that education." And make sure that she understood what it meant to have those sacrifices made for her. The day she said that to me, I knew I was marrying or going to marry the right woman. My mom -- when my parents got divorced, coming from a very Catholic family was very difficult. My mom worked three jobs to keep us in Catholic school and she still had three at home. I never went without anything. Those corduroy pants were always there. And I follow that tradition and both of my daughters are graduates. One of them -- they both went to all-girls school. One went to St. Lucy's in Glendora, which is at the time that she went there 900 girls and all run by sisters, Sisters of Good Charity, I think they were. They're not all there yet anymore but -- and then, my other daughter went to Alverno High School, which is a much smaller school. But they both went. And now as grown adults, I know I look great, but I have a 32 year old and a 30 year old. Both are girls, both went to Catholic school. And they have their choice of whatever high school they wanted to go to. That was dad's thing. You can go to whatever high school you want to as long as it's a Catholic school. So, the reason I share those stories with you is because every child has the opportunity to get an education wherever they go. But it comes from the faith base that you come from. Whether it's Baptist, whether it's Christian, whether it's Catholic, you need to set the goals from home, not expect that the teachers do all of your work.

>> That's right.

>> So, I'm here to tell you that the Catholic schools that my girls went to, and I'm sorry if anybody's offended by this, was an all-White school. I told this story at dinner the other day. That I was pulling out -- when they were having one of their activities and it was Thanksgiving. And I was pulling out the turkey, I was there to volunteer, pulling out the turkey from the oven. And one of the mothers said -- had spilled something, the other mother said to her, "Don't worry about it. Just get Jesus to clean it up for you." and pointed to me. And I kind of looked at her and I went, "Are you talking to me?" And she actually thought I was serious. And so, we all have our crosses to bear, some of us more than others. But like good shepherds, we all have to take that message out.

>> Very good. Thank you so much. And on a final note, if I could get Delila to ask or answer this question, how can public and Catholic schools continue collaborating for the success of our communities?

>> There are many ways. And because I know we're short on time, I'm going to give you one example. I am new to San Bernardino but I also believe that being new is not an excuse to knock on doors. And it's not an excuse to find the people who are willing to collaborate and work. Last year, I was able to get a grant from the San Bernardino City Public School system to have a full immersion Spanish program in our Catholic school. And I did that because I collaborate, because I go out and I ask, "What are you doing and how can we work together?" My initial conversation for that grant was, here in San Bernardino, we only have one Catholic high school. That one Catholic high school gets students from all of the primary Catholic schools in the county of San Bernardino. Just thinking about the numbers, what that translates into is that the children that are graduating from our Catholic school are going into the public school. And they are a positive influence. They are role models. They have good habits and they improve the scores of the Catholic -- of the public schools. So, it's only be fitting that we collaborate, that we have a two-way communication, and that we work together. So last summer, we had that. This summer, we will have it again. And what we do is, we take the children from the City of San Bernardino and from our schools, the third graders. And we work at grade level, third grade, and we use the curriculum from the Consulate of Mexico, to practice the same skills that they practice all year long in third grade in English, we practice them in Spanish. In addition to that, we did cultural awareness. What we did is we took the kids that were in our program, we put them in the bus and we took them to East LA. If what we're doing is teaching them culture, we have to go to the heart of the culture. In California, there is a lot of history, particularly for Latinos in East LA and most kids don't even know where it is. No matter how close and accessible it might be. So, we went and we watched the play. It was a Latino adaptation of The Little Red Riding Hood, something that talked about the rite of passage, very common and very touching for the families that attended because we took parents too. And that's one of the many ways in which Catholic schools and public schools can collaborate. We can be innovative and we can do things differently. But we can also work together.

>> Great, thank you very much. Let's give our panel a big round of applause. Thank you so much and God bless you all.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

END – 00:30:21