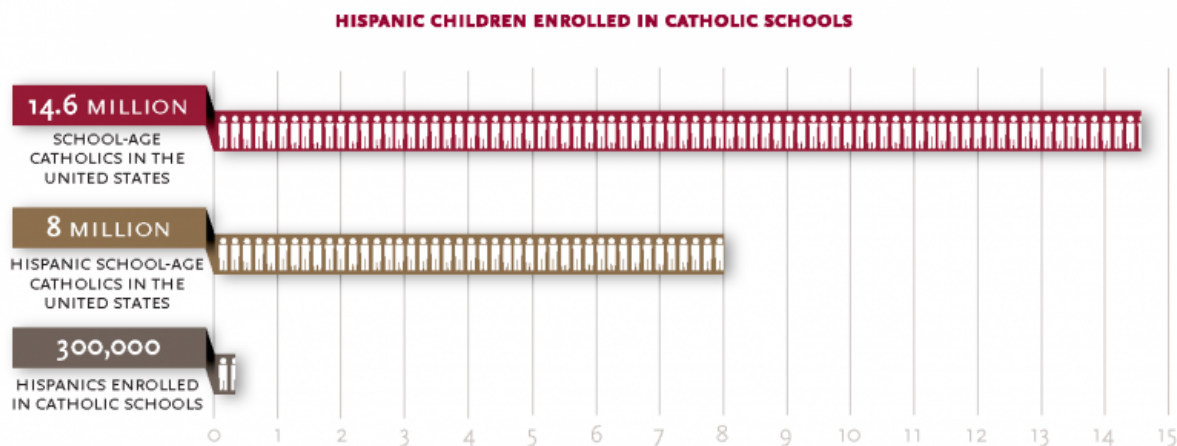


# Catholic schools that fail to serve fast-growing Hispanic population put futures at risk

March 7 2016



Just 300,000 Hispanic children attend Catholic Schools, amounting to 2.4 percent of the nation's 12.4 million school-age Hispanic children -- of which 8 million are school-age Hispanic Catholics. Overall enrollment in Catholic schools is 1.9 million students. Credit: Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church

The slow pace of change in Catholic schools as they adjust to an increasingly Hispanic Church poses significant barriers to Hispanic families when considering enrolling their children in parochial schools, according to a [new Boston College study](#) that reveals complex challenges

for school leaders and clergy trying to serve the fastest-growing population of U.S. Catholics.

Despite efforts to increase Hispanic enrollment for the past two decades, the number of Hispanic children attending Catholic schools has remained stagnant at approximately 300,000 - just 2.4 percent of the nation's 12.4 million school-age Hispanic children, of which approximately 8 million are Catholic.

Cost has often been cited as the most obvious reason, but the first-of-its-kind study "Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church" points to additional factors that stifle school vitality and the Church's engagement with a young generation that by its sheer size is expected to emerge as America's most influential group of Catholics.

Boston College's Assistant Professor of Theology and Ministry Hosffman Ospino and Barbara and Patrick Roche Center for Catholic Education Executive Director Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill conducted the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families. Out of 1,488 schools identified as serving Hispanic families, 656 schools in 130 dioceses responded, accounting for 10 percent of all Catholic schools. Among the findings:

- Just 14 percent of Catholic school leaders and 12-percent of teachers self-identify as Hispanic; while 17 percent of school leaders reported they speak Spanish
- Only 17 percent of the schools have recruitment strategies to hire bilingual teachers
- Approximately 23 percent of school leaders received training about Hispanic culture, but only 17 percent received training about Hispanic ministry and theology
- Two or fewer Hispanics serve on the boards of 68 percent of the schools, including nearly 200 schools that reported no Hispanic

board members.

- At the diocesan level, Catholic schools administrative offices and offices focused on Hispanic ministry interact rarely or infrequently

Those disparities amount to missed opportunities in mission and ministry for Catholic schools and the Church itself, according the researchers.

"Given the striking growth of the Hispanic Catholic school-age population and the declining enrollment in Catholic schools, the Church must be realistic and plan creatively—and prophetically—to serve this critical and growing group of American Catholics," said Ospino, who in 2014 conducted a groundbreaking study of Catholic parishes serving Hispanic Catholics.

Though 6 in 10 schools provide at least one program to support English Language Learners, the programs vary by region. The study noted that most schools do little to integrate the Hispanic experience into their overall school culture, treating these differences at times as deficits instead of opportunities.

Schools using the inclusive dual-language, or "two-way", immersion model of instruction were highlighted by the study. These schools reported much larger percentages of Hispanic teachers and staff, including 44 percent of full-time and 33 percent of part-time teachers, and more opportunities to incorporate Hispanic culture and traditions.

Hispanic families seek Catholic schools that offer them educational excellence, affirm the language that most speak at home and honor their culture, according to Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill.

The survey found signs that some schools are trying to improve outreach to Hispanic Catholics, though many schools continue to struggle to fully

embrace Hispanic culture:

- Just 21 percent use Spanish and English for prominent signage
- Only 25 percent report using culturally diverse and inclusive school symbols
- About 35 percent share school prayers in Spanish and English
- Approximately 36 percent offer liturgies at least partly in Spanish

"Hispanic enrollment is undoubtedly one important part of the conversation, yet that conversation is futile without a critical assessment of the shared mission, school cultures, and the structures of Catholic schools," said Weitzel-O'Neill, whose Roche Center for Catholic Education is part of the Lynch School of Education at BC. "We need to clarify the role of Catholic education for the next generation of U.S. Catholic children and youth—who are mostly Hispanic and increasingly diverse."

A majority of the responding schools reported providing need-based financial aid to approximately half of their Hispanic students. For one-in-five of these students, that assistance covers at least 50 percent of their tuition.

"This demonstrates one strategy and a high level of commitment among Catholic schools to serve the largest body of school-age Catholics in the U.S.," said Ospino. Added Weitzel-O'Neill, "Intentional enrollment planning based on mission and Catholic Identity, must include multiple strategies to welcome and collaborate with Hispanic families and create supportive school cultures."

In September, the BC researchers will hold the first National Summit on Catholic Schools and Hispanic Families to examine challenges raised by this research and develop strategies for Catholic schools to better engage

with this critical demographic group.

**More information:** To view the report or learn more about the National Summit on Catholic Schools and Hispanic Families, please visit the Roche Center website: [www.rochecenter.org](http://www.rochecenter.org)

Provided by Boston College

Citation: Catholic schools that fail to serve fast-growing Hispanic population put futures at risk (2016, March 7) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-catholic-schools-fast-growing-hispanic-population.html>

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