

Allowing native language in school benefits Mexican-American students, researcher finds

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A new University of Missouri study shows that Mexican-American students who identify and practice speaking their native language have higher grades than those who are put in English-only environments in their schools.

"A real educational disparity exists because Mexican-Americans, along with other [Latinos](#), are now the largest minority; yet, they still have the lowest high school and college graduation rates," said David Aguayo, a [doctoral student](#) in the Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology in the College of Education. "I understand the reasons behind English-only efforts, but the research shows that if we don't accept the cultural identity of these students in our schools, such as tolerating their [native language](#), Mexican-Americans may not succeed."

Aguayo compared [survey results](#) of 408 Mexican-American students. He examined whether the students were born in the U.S. or Mexico; the students' grade point averages; and the students' abilities to perform college-related tasks. Aguayo found that students who embraced their cultural heritage and spoke in their native languages had higher grade point averages than those that only spoke English while in school and at home.

"It's a simple correlation, but living and learning within your [cultural heritage](#) is a benefit," Aguayo said. "It could be speaking the language in school, eating certain foods, or interacting with other people who share your heritage. The [stress level](#) of being in a new culture will decrease if

these students have a support system in school, while they are adjusting to other cultures." In the future, Aguayo will study the motivations of Mexican-American students who move to the U.S. Statistics show these students have more success in school than Mexican-American students who have lived in the U.S. their entire lives.

"Educators need to be aware of students' home lives," Aguayo said. "Immigrant parents, in particular, tend to put more trust in educators, rather than being involved in the child's education like we normally see in the U.S. If educators can take the time to learn about the parents' culture, the educators can have a positive impact on the students' future."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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