



## Much rides on graduation for Latino high school students -- Henry Ng and Megan L. Sprecher

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By **Plain Dealer** guest columnist

MetroHealth Medical Center's Division of Health Services for Hispanic Children and Adolescents addresses the specific medical, psychological and social needs of Cleveland's Latino youth. This clinic specializes in the holistic treatment of Spanish-speaking children and adolescents, most of whom are Puerto Rican and therefore U.S. citizens.

While not all patients have limited English proficiency, many do. Among our patients' recurring needs are educational services and academic achievement.



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Lonnie Timmons III, The Plain Dealer

A bicycle rider carrying a flag travels on St. Clair Avenue in downtown Cleveland during the 39th annual Puerto Rican Parade in August 2007.

Earning a high school diploma has significant implications for youth in terms of predicting socioeconomic achievement and success throughout the rest of their lives. The median earnings for a high school graduate are about double the median earnings for someone without a high school diploma, a U.S. Census American Community Survey Report from September 2011 shows. It adds that "in addition to higher earnings, people with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed full-time, year-round."

Educational attainment is also directly correlated to health, according to a 2009 report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America. The report notes that "adults who have not graduated from high school are more than 2.5 times as likely to be in less than very good health as college graduates."

These health and socioeconomic figures are especially alarming when looking at high school graduation rates in the Cleveland School District, stratified by race, ethnicity and English proficiency. The 2009-2010 graduation rate for all students in the district was 62.8 percent, well below the national graduation rate of 75 percent. Even more alarming is the 56.1 percent graduation rate for students with limited English proficiency

and the 30.2 percent graduation rate for Latino students.

Effectively meeting the educational needs of Latino students becomes an even bigger priority for the district as the proportion of Latino students increases. According to the Ohio Department of Education, the percentage of Latino students in the district increased from 10 percent to 13.2 percent over the past five years.

Through efforts such as partnering with the local organization Esperanza Inc., the district has increased its efforts to better serve Latino students. This school year, the district also created its first Limited English Proficiency Assistance Plan to provide necessary interpreting and translating services to parents who need help. The implementation of this plan will better equip limited English proficiency parents to engage in their children's education.

Another way the district can keep Latino students and improve graduation rates is through increased school options for students with limited English proficiency. The Plain Dealer highlighted this in a Feb. 15 article, which referenced the district's efforts to fill empty spaces at its higher-rated schools.

Though not mentioned in the article, Clark School was the only one of the higher-rated schools listed that is identified on the district's website as offering bilingual/English-as-a-Second- Language (ESL) instruction. None of the high schools, or schools listed in the article as "new and innovative," offer bilingual/ESL instruction.

We commend the district's ongoing efforts to close the gap between graduation rates for Latino students and the district's overall graduation rate. As part of these efforts, the district must ensure that higher-rated and new and innovative schools are available to all students, including those who need bilingual/ESL instruction. The health and well-being of Cleveland's Latino children and the Greater Cleveland community are at stake.

*Dr. Henry Ng is clinical director of MetroHealth's Health Services for Hispanic Children and Adolescents and PRIDE Clinic, assistant program director for MetroHealth's Center for Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and president-elect of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality. Megan L. Sprecher is project leader of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Community Advocacy Program, a medical-legal partnership with MetroHealth.*

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