

## Presentation Summary

### **The Educational Well-Being of Latino Children: A Philadelphia Story of Challenges and Possibilities**

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# Background

## The Philadelphia Third-Grade Cohort Study— What’s Behind Being Behind?

On July 29, 2010, John Fantuzzo presented findings from his research on the educational well-being of Latino children in the Philadelphia public school system to leaders of the Latino community. The meeting was convened by Johnny Irizzary, Director of Casa Latina, and Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Director of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. The findings shared were drawn from a study Fantuzzo conducted on the 12,046 children enrolled in third grade in the 2005–06 school year, 15% of whom were Latino, to examine how social, family, and health risks affected their academic performance and behavior. This was the first group or cohort in the Philadelphia School District to take the reading and mathematics tests mandated for third grade by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation passed in 2002. If the children were not reaching proficiency, Fantuzzo asked, what was holding them back? What was behind being behind?

The study used data from the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS), one of the nation’s first systems built to integrate data from various agencies in order to identify risks and improve public services. KIDS contained data on the children’s demographics, academic performance, and behavior from the School District of Philadelphia, as well as information about social, family and health risks from City of Philadelphia agencies.

## The Challenges

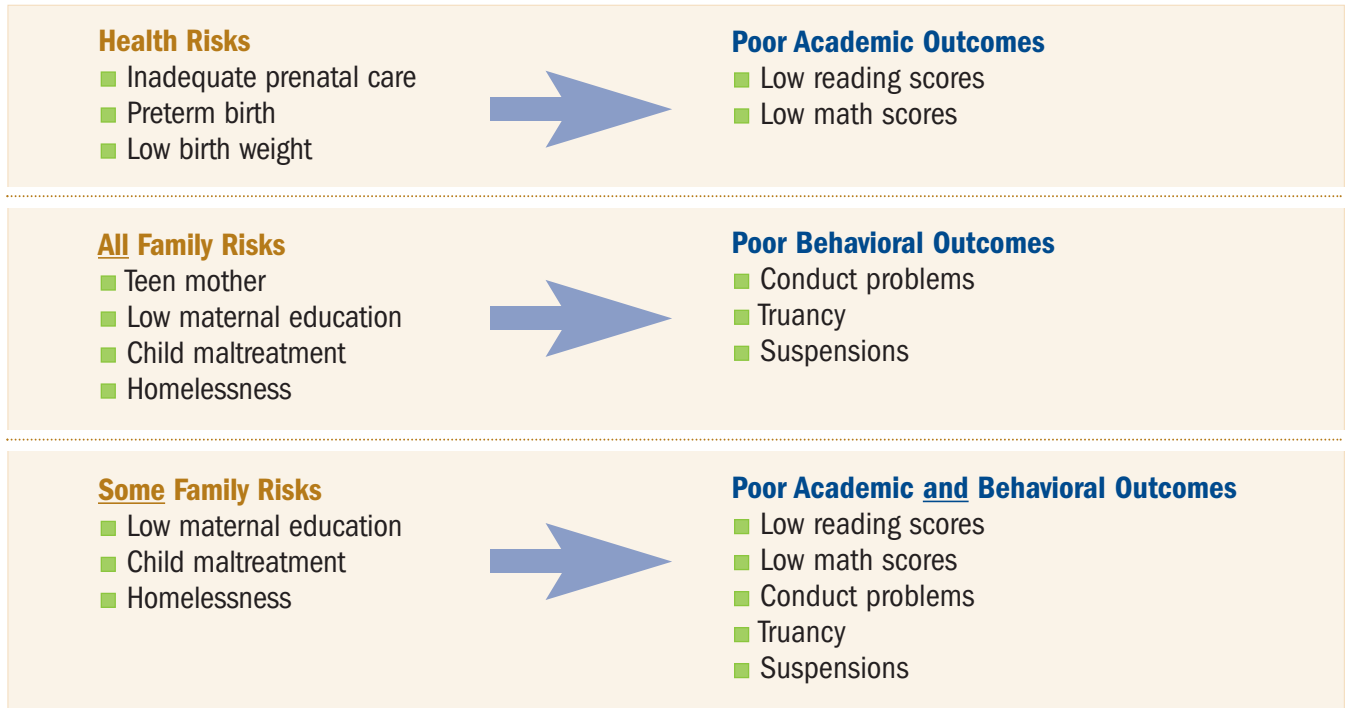
### Large percentages of Latino third-graders fell short of proficiency in reading and math and were truant.

School data showed that a large percentage of children in the third-grade cohort were not proficient in reading and math (as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment—PSSA) and had problems with classroom conduct, truancy, and suspensions. Latino children fared worse than their peers in all areas but classroom conduct: 64% were not proficient in reading; 46% were not proficient in math; 40% were truant (having 8 or more absences); 12% were suspended at least once; and 25% demonstrated poor classroom conduct.

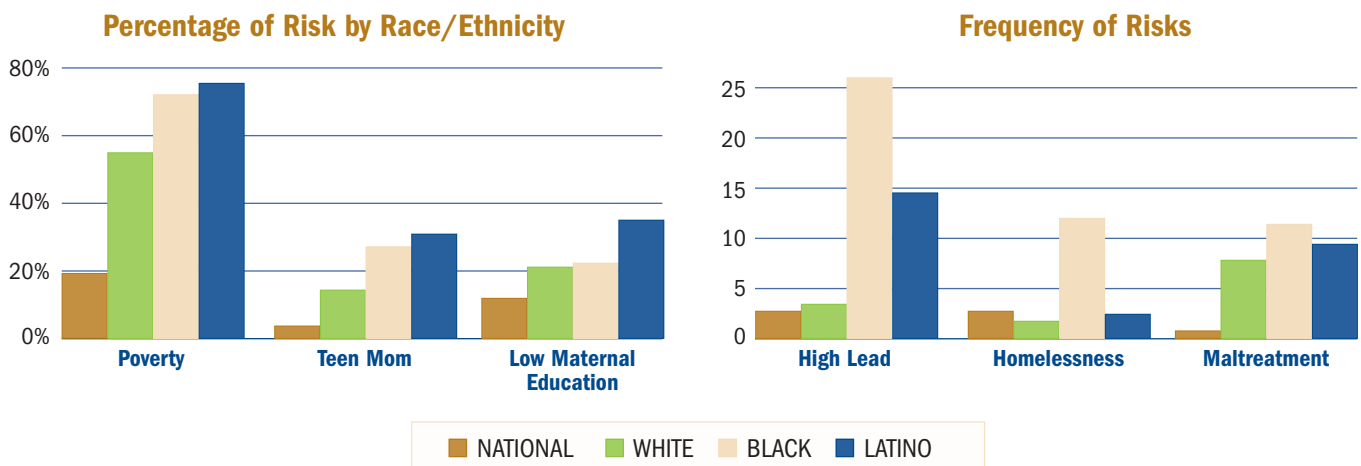
School Outcomes	Latino	African-American	Caucasian
Not proficient in Reading	64%	62	40
Not proficient in Math	46%	45	22
Truant	40%	39	19
Suspended	12%	12	5
Poor Classroom Conduct	25%	28	15

## Latino children were affected by a mix of social, family, and health issues.

Controlling for poverty—70% of the third-grade cohort came from families living at or below the poverty level. **Fantuzzo and his colleagues identified eight publicly monitored risks that contributed to these poor outcomes:** lead toxicity, preterm birth, low birth weight, inadequate prenatal care, being the child of a teen mother or a mother without a high school education, substantiated child maltreatment, and family homelessness.



While nearly all Philadelphia third-graders faced some of these risks, a greater proportion of Latino children (31%) than other children (4% nationally) had teen mothers or mothers who did not have a high school diploma (35% versus 12% nationally). Latino children also had a significantly higher risk than children nationally of lead exposure (15% versus 3%) and maltreatment (10% versus 1%). On the other hand, Latino children had a lower risk of homelessness than their Philadelphia and national peers, presumably reflecting the strong role of family support in the Latino community.

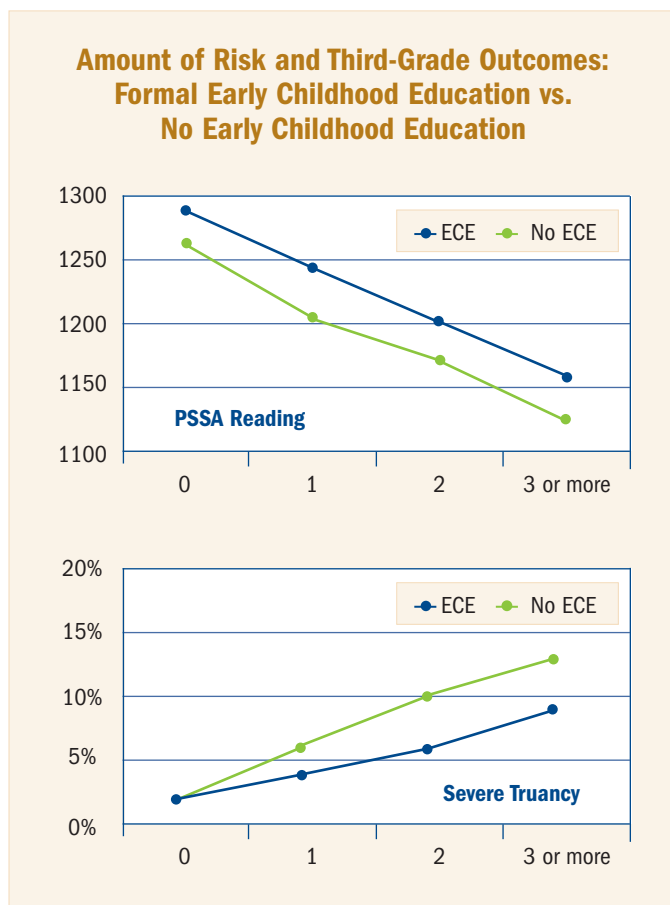


Fantuzzo and his team also found that **the more risks children had, the worse they performed academically and the more likely they were to be truant.** When they looked at groups of children who had experienced “0”, “1”, “2”, or “3 or more” of these risks, they found successively lower proficiency scores and higher rates of truancy with each increment of risk. This finding is particularly significant given that poor academic performance and poor attendance are early indicators that a student may drop out of high school. The dropout rate for Latinos who start ninth grade in the Philadelphia School District is 44%, according to data cited by the Philadelphia School Reform Commission’s African American and Latino Male Dropout Task Force in its September 2010 report.

## The Opportunities

### Reason for hope: Early childhood education helps children beat the odds

To demonstrate that risk is not the final story, Fantuzzo shared research indicating how early childhood education (ECE) helps to reduce the effects of risks on young children. Children in the third-grade cohort who had experienced formal early childhood education had a lower risk for poor reading and math outcomes and for truancy. Also, when they looked at the amount of risk children experienced, they found that children who had ECE (blue line in graph) performed at levels consistently above children with no ECE (red line), regardless of the number of risks.



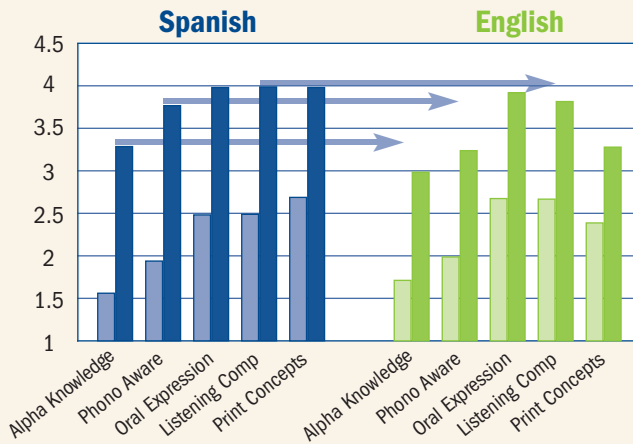
Taking a closer look at Latino children with three or more risks who were nonetheless proficient, Fantuzzo and colleagues learned that these children were more likely to attend formal early childhood programs than students who were not proficient. Participating in an early childhood education program may contribute to the resilience of these children with the highest number of risk factors. This would support the research literature that indicates the protective influence of early childhood education for children at higher than average risk for poor educational outcomes. Fantuzzo stressed how important it is for us to conduct more studies that identify factors that help children at high risk “beat the odds.” We need a twofold approach: First we need to identify effective services that lessen the impact of these risks, and second we need to make visible the child, family and community protective factors that help make children at high risk resilient so we, as a community, can actively promote them.

## Improving the quality of early childhood education through programs like EPIC is our best hope of closing the achievement gap

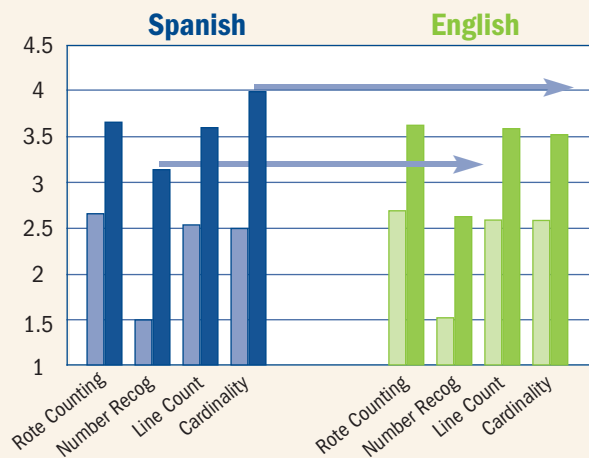
Fantuzzo continued his presentation by giving an overview of an ECE program that he developed and scientifically tested through a federal grant, with Penn Graduate School of Education colleagues Vivian Gadsden and Paul McDermott, in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia: the Evidence-based Program for the Integration of Curricula (EPIC). EPIC includes a scientifically-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum that integrates early mathematics, language, literacy, and learning behaviors. EPIC is unique in that it uses assessment as a tool that keeps teachers informed of students' progress, it engages parents in their children's education through home-based activities, and it involves teachers in a learning community of their own, where they can share ideas and problems and contribute to building the curriculum.

Fantuzzo and his colleagues tested EPIC in a randomized controlled trial in over 80 Philadelphia Head Start classrooms with more than 1,600 children and their families. **EPIC produced superior language and mathematics results when compared to the curriculum that was used in the control classrooms. More specifically, their research showed that Latino children benefited from EPIC.** While all Latino children made significant progress in developing reading and math skills and mastering behaviors essential to learning, Latino children who spoke Spanish as their primary language surpassed the English-speaking Latino children.

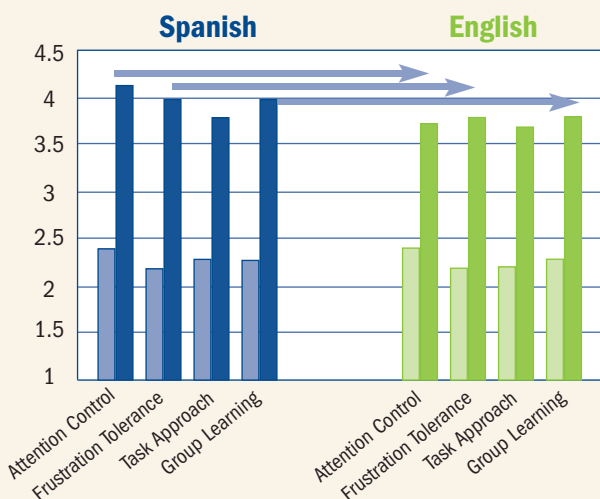
**Progress in Literacy Skills—Fall to Spring Latino Children by Primary Language in EPIC**



**Progress in Mathematic Skills—Fall to Spring Latino Children by Primary Language in EPIC**



**Progress in Learning Behaviors—Fall to Spring Latino Children by Primary Language in EPIC**



**Latino children in EPIC responded especially well to instruction in learning behaviors such as paying attention, dealing with frustration, problem solving, and working with others. Latino children’s families also showed high levels of participation in EPIC’s family learning activities,** known as Home Connections, that the children take home each week to practice skills with their parents or other family members. Over the course of a year, families of Latino children returned 90% of these “homework” assignments.

Mr. Irizarry and Dr. Farnsworth-Alvear led a discussion with the group to consider the implications of the findings. Participants stressed the importance of substantive collaboration with all the institutions, community groups, advocates, and individuals who care about the well-being of Latino children. It was agreed that productive collaboration could take the form of:

- Interagency programming to reduce the effects of risks associated with poor educational outcomes
- Enhancing the effectiveness of early childhood interventions like EPIC for dual language learners
- More research focused specifically on children who are beating the odds, what enables them to do well despite their circumstances?

## Fast Facts

### Philadelphia 2005-06 Third-Grade Cohort Study: What’s Behind Being Behind?

#### ► The Educational Well-Being of Latino Children in Philadelphia

#### Philadelphia’s third-graders evidenced substantial challenges to academic and behavioral adjustment.

- 58% of the cohort did not meet state reading proficiency standards, and 41% did not meet similar standards for math.
- 34% of the cohort had 8 or more unexcused absences, meeting the threshold for truancy; 7% had 25 or more unexcused absences, the criterion for severe truancy.
- More than one child in 10 had been suspended during the third-grade academic year.

#### Latino children in the third-grade cohort demonstrated higher rates of poor academic and behavioral outcomes.

- 64% of Latino children did not meet proficiency in reading, compared to 62% of African American and 40% of White children.
- Latino children were more than twice as likely not to meet proficiency in math compared to White children (46% versus 22%).
- More than twice as many Latino children than White children were truant more than 25 days (40% versus 19%).
- More than twice as many Latino and African American children than White children were suspended (12% versus 5%).

**Compared to national percentages, Philadelphia third-graders—  
Latino children in particular—had substantially more early risks factors.**

- Teen mother: 4% nationally; 31% of Latino children in the Philadelphia third-grade cohort.
- Low maternal education: 12% nationally; 35% of Latino children in the Philadelphia third-grade cohort.
- Poverty: 19% nationally; 76% of Latino children in the Philadelphia third-grade cohort.
- Maltreatment: 1% nationally; 10% of Latino children in the Philadelphia third-grade cohort.
- High lead exposure: 3% nationally; 15% of Latino children in the Philadelphia third-grade cohort.

**Family- and health-related risk factors had differing  
effects on academic and behavioral outcomes.**

- Child maltreatment, homelessness, and having a mother who did not graduate from high school were related to both academic and behavioral outcomes.
- Health-related risks, including preterm or low birth weight, inadequate prenatal care, and high lead exposure, were related to academic outcomes (reading and math) but not behavioral outcomes (truancy, suspensions, and classroom conduct).
- All family risks, including child maltreatment, homelessness, having a teen mother, and having a mother who did not graduate from high school, were related to behavioral outcomes.

**Latino children in Philadelphia who participated as preschoolers in Evidence-based  
Program for the Integration of Curricula (EPIC) demonstrated substantial gains in  
academic and learning behavior outcomes.**